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PC PowerPlay

ISSUE 13

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What we're playing: Interstate '76, Theme Hospital, Civ 2, Imperium Galactica, Quake: Armagon Mission Pack, Micro Machines 3, Super Mario Kart 64.

Editorial

It just happens. At one time or another, every PC gamer is forced to address the issue of the games console and their place in the life of a PC gamer. Countless arguments have begun on the subject - several have even been concluded without degenerating into ugly bouts of technical parochialism. But the reality remains: the new generation of consoles offer fast and technically advanced gaming at a price just about anybody can afford. So why aren't we all ditching our PCs in favour of these injection-moulded plastic miracles? The simple truth is that PC games tend to be a hell of a lot better than console games. For grown-ups, that is. Kids and occasional gamers like the instant action consoles deliver. The 3D action is still a new and exciting thing for them, while the minimal documentation and zero configuration requirements are a happy bonus.

No amount of "but Mum, I can do my homework on a PC" justification actually carries any real-world weight. The only thing that really counts is the games. We like big, complicated epics that take weeks to *master*, let alone finish. We expect each new game to offer a unique and fresh gaming experience. Even bad games aren't often immediately recognisable - it can takes many hours of playing before it's clear a game is a dud. Good hours too, not wasted, but spent exercising the mind, exploring the game engine and trying to get on top of it.

Consoles have their place though. A few mates gathered around the TV in comfy chairs can be a hoot. Problem is, it gets dull after not too long. Still, it's a good setup to have in your home. A PC for *gaming*, with a console for a bout of competitive 3D *fun*.

It's an argument that's run rampant across the newsgroups and it's not going away in a hurry. The Console vs. PC debate is rich with material for comparison and debate. We're having our turn this issue. It's not really a comparison though - each is there for its own thing and does it better than the other. Read it and learn, consoles are powerful and attractive toys, but for the sort of gaming that lasts the distance you'll be needing a PC.

Ben

The PC PowerPlay scoring system

90%+ A classic. Either an unquestionable example of superiority within its genre, or a ground breaking game that'll be setting trends.

80-90% A strong, eminently platable game. Hard to fault and likely to still be on the hard drive in 6 months time.

60-80% Competant and generally enjoyable. Flaws or mediocrity hold these games back from higher ratings.

40-60% Average and ordinary. Not bad, not good. Ideal gift

0-40% Bad, really bad. Boring, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible

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CD GUIDE

Games to play and tools to tool around with. Here it is.

CD Tech

Win 95

Running the Powerplay CD under Win 95 is best. All the games will appear on the menu and run, whether Win 95 or DOS.

CLICK ON THE POWERWIN ICON

DOS

Around half the games are DOS. The Powerplay DOS menu will only show DOS games

TYPE PCPOWER AT THE CD PROMPT (PROBABLY D:)

Win 3.1x

Some games will run under Win3.1x. The Powerplay menu won't work under Win3.1x, so run them straight from the CD with File Manager

RUN STRAIGHT FROM CD

Krush Kill and Destroy

DOS

Krush Kill and Destroy is an unashamed Command and Conquer clone that has been written on our own shores. Sporting many excellent features such as queued building and a brilliant AI, it's very impressive indeed.

System requirements: Pentium, 16Mb RAM, Soundcard.

This games is controlled with a Mouse.

Interstate 76

Win95

The coolest game to put rubber to the road. You're Groove Champion, a road vigilante in an alternative 70's world where muscle cars with weapons rebel against some serious corruption and dish out their own justice. Chill baby to the grooviest sound track this side of flares and afro's, and don't forget to give a copy to your friends, so you can tell them to get funked. A must-play demo.

System requirements: Pentium, Win 95,16Mb RAM, Soundcard

This game is supports a Joystick/Gamepad.

• Driving:

Accelerate = Numpad Up
Brake = Numpad Down
Steer Left/Right = Numpad Left/Right
Emergency Brake = Z
Reverse = Tab
Shift Up = . (Period)
Shift Down = , (Comma)

• Radar:

Radar Range = R
Target Nearest Enemy = T
Target Next Enemy = E
Cancel Target = Y
Target Under Reticle = Q

• Weapons:

Fire Weapon = Space Bar
Cycle Weapon = Enter
Fire Weapon 1 = 1
Fire Weapon 2 = 2
Fire Weapon 3 = 2
Fire Weapon 4 = 4
Fire Weapon 5 = 5
Aim Handgun = Arrow Key Left/Right

• Views:

View Dash = Arrow Key Up
Look Left/Right = Arrow Key Left/Right
Look Back = Arrow Key Down
Toggle Cockpit View = F1
Adjustable External Cam = F2
External Cam Rear = F3
External User to Target = F4
External Target to User = F5
No Cockpit = F6
Fender Cam Front = F7
Fender Cam Rear = F8
Beauty Shot Front = F9
Satellite View = F10
Missile Cam = F11
Toggle Resolution = F12
Zoom In (External Cam) = Page Up
Zoom Out (External Cam) = Page Down

• Other

Horn = G
Headlights On/Off = H
View Map = M
View Notepad = N
Binoculars = B

Theme Hospital

Win95

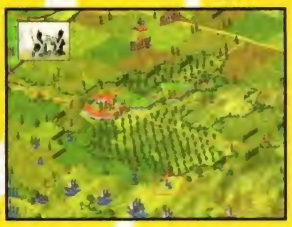
Bullfrog are renown as being the people that are truly innovative and unique in game invention. Theme Hospital seems to break every rule of enjoyment, managing a hospital of all things. These gaming Gods however have made a thoroughly amusing and entertaining game. For fans of Theme Park and those new to this action strategy genre, a must try demo.

System requirements: Pentium, Windows 95,

16Mb RAM, Soundcard.
This game is controlled using the mouse.
• To start learning Theme Hospital, follow the instructions in the tutorial.
Once you have a reception desk and a GP's Office, you will need to build more rooms to diagnose patients further and cure them. Make sure to build a General Diagnosis Room
• To administer drug cures, you will need a pharmacy and a Nurse to go in it. If the patient has a psychiatric disease, you will need to build a Psychiatric Room which requires a Doctor with a psychiatric skill. When on the Hire Staff Panel looking through Doctors, look for a symbol appear that looks like an open book. This means that that Doctor is qualified to cure psychiatric diseases.
• The last cure room you will need will be the Inflator Room; this cures Bloaty Head disease in a very graphic manner.
• Don't forget to build a Staff Room, some toilets and a Ward where patients can rest.
• Furnish your corridors by buying benches and drinks machines.
Often patients will not be completely diagnosed because there aren't enough diagnosis rooms to discover the strain of their disease. They will be diagnosed a certain percentage and you will then have the choice of either sending them home or taking a chance on a cure. If the patient is 40% diagnosed then there will be a 4 in 10 chance he will be cured but there is also a 6 in 10 chance he will die.

Battleground Waterloo

DOS



Travel back in time to the regime of Napoleon and potentially change history in the simulation of the Battle of Waterloo.
System requirements: 486, 8Mb RAM, Win 95, Soundcard
This game is controlled by mouse.
• To see a fully automated demo, do the following. First launch the demo, then, when prompted, select Automatic A/I for both French and Allied sides.
• To try a battle against the computer, select Automatic A/I for one side and Manual mode for the side you wish to play.
• To advance to the next phase, select the Next Phase menu item from the Phase menu, or click on the clock icon in the upper left hand corner of the tool box.
• To move your units, Select a unit by first clicking on its map hex with the left mouse button. Then either double-click to select the entire stack of units in that hex, then click the right mouse button on a hex adjacent to that unit on the map.
• To Fire, in the Fire phase, Select the unit you wish to fire in the same way you selected it for moving, then clicking on its picture at the bottom of the screen. Select its target by clicking with the right mouse button on a hex containing one or more enemy units.

Dog Day

Win95

Embark upon this unique adventure in a world where dogs rule supreme. Enjoy this highly detailed demo and ponder whether it really is "a dog's life".
System requirements: Pentium, 16Mb RAM, Soundcard, Windows 95
This game is controlled by mouse.
To move about in the game, Just click on parts of the screen you wish and things will happen...
To use an object that you have picked up, simply Drag and Drop it where you want to use it.
Right Mouse brings up a Context Menu.

Helicop Investigates Words and Numbers

Win95

Who says education need not be fun. Set your kids (or younger brothers and sisters) down to play this and amidst the enemies to vanquish (in cute ways of course), there's spelling and math problems to solve. Learning by stealth.
System requirements: 486, 8Mb RAM, Soundcard
This game supports a Joystick/Gamepad
Up = Up
Down = Down
Left = Left
Right = Right
Space = Fire

Minigolf

Win95

Minigolf, that relaxing game you play with a bunch of close friends that never brings out anyone's overly competitive side... NOT! Yes the game that has you putting multiple coloured balls through obstacles such as windmills and dangling logs.
You know, the game where the most uncoordinated member miraculously putts holes in one, and you're struggling to putt under 5. Now, challenge them on the virtual course - you supply the tantrums.
System requirements: Pentium, 16Mb RAM, Win 95, Soundcard.
This application is controlled with the mouse.
In Minigolf, Each player may customise his/her putting options via the Pull-down menus (which appear automatically).
EASY PUTT
Line up the putter icon in the direction you want to putt the ball. A thin white direction indicator will show your aim (this feature can be turned off in the Options Menu). Click and hold the left mouse button to start the backswing. Release the mouse button to hit the ball.
TRUE PUTT
Line up the putter icon in the direction you want to putt the ball. Click the left mouse and drag the mouse back towards you. Then push the mouse forward, The speed of the push determines the speed of the shot. The faster you move the putter toward the ball, the stronger and farther the shot.

Last Express

Win95

It's Paris, 1914. The world is on the brink of war and you are Robert Cath, a young American who is urgently summoned by his friend Tyler Whitney to join him on the train departing the Gare de l'Est, for Constantinople.
Arriving late, (because you were too busy singing "Istanbul was Constantinople") you are overcome with the heavy feeling of danger. Before you can grab hold of your senses, the adventure overtakes you, and you are plunged into a world of suspense, romance, international intrigue, and murder.
System requirements: Pentium, 16Mb RAM, Win 95, Soundcard,
This game is controlled using the mouse.
To move around, click the appropriate destination or Icon.

Darklight Conflict

DOS

A futuristic 3D space simulator like Tie Fighter. Instead of just 3D missions, their is also an adventuring element.
This demo is limited to 4 minutes of arcade gameplay or 2 missions in the Adventure.
System requirements: 486, 8Mb RAM, Soundcard.
This games supports a Joystick/Gamepad/Mouse.
BASIC CONTROLS - KEYBOARD ONLY (default):
Climb = Down Arrow.
Dive = Up Arrow.
Left = Left Arrow.
Right = Right Arrow.
Bank Left = Left ALT + Left Arrow.
Bank Right = Left ALT + Right Arrow.
Fire Primary Weapon = Space.
Fire Secondary Weapon = Left ALT.
Speed = 1-9. 0 for none, minus for Reverse.
Afterburner = Left ALT + Up Arrow.
Shield = Press and hold Space.
Scanner Range Toggle = Tab.
Pause = P.

CD GUIDE continued...

Quake 1.06 DOS

You asked, and asked, and asked for it. For all of you who missed Quake the first time around, here it is again. This time at V 1.06 and all bug fixes included. Here's a game that needs no introduction so...

System requirements: Pentium, 16Mb RAM, Soundcard.

This game supports a Mouse Joystick/Gamepad.

Forward = Up arrow
Backward = Down Arrow
Turn Left = Left Arrow
Turn Right = Right arrow
Fire = ctrl
Strafe = ALT [+ Left and Right Arrow]
Console = ` (tilde)

Handy options to type into the console

+mlook = Look with the mouse and move with the keyboard.

Oddballz Win95

Embrace these totally adorable things! They sing, swoon and can even be transformed. From the people who brought you Catz and Dogz, these clever little programs feature Neural Net technology as they grow and learn.

System requirements: 486, 16Mb RAM, Win 95, Soundcard.

This is controlled using the mouse.

To pet or tickle your Petz, simply click and hold the left mouse button while the cursor is anywhere over them.

If you tickle your Petz long enough and in the right spots, you might discover some surprising results.

Hold a Grubz in front of your Oddballz to get them to perform tricks.

Shake the Grubz to get your Oddballz to move on to the next trick, or drop the treat immediately to reward your Petz for a trick you like. Which teaches them to do it again.

Repeat this procedure until your Oddballz performs the appropriate trick as soon as you pull out the Grubz.

Be patient, Oddballz have a wide variety of tricks to show you.

To pick up Oddballz and move them to a new location, click the right mouse button while the cursor is anywhere over your Petz.

Soul Trap Win95

Slip into a surrealistic adventure where you face your greatest fears. Enter into a world of nightmares inside the twisted dreams of Malcolm West and face the fears that have plagued him throughout his entire life.

System requirements: Pentium, Windows 95, 16Mb RAM, Soundcard.

This game is controlled using the mouse.

How to Play:

Forward = Up arrow
Backwards = Down arrow
Strafe Left = Left Arrow
Strafe Right = Right Arrow
Look around = Mouse
Fire = Left Mouse button
Jump = Right Mouse Button

wish to attack, and right-click your mouse or press the spacebar.

• To "throw" a thermal detonator, left-click on it in your inventory, place it wherever you want to do some serious damage, and left-click again.

Zyclunt Win95

A horizontally scrolling Manga platform. Nice neo-japan style graphics, large nasty end of level bosses and runs as a window on your desktop.

System requirements: Pentium, 16Mb RAM, Windows 95 Soundcard.

This game supports a joystick/Gamepad

Left = Left Arrow (Double tap to run)
Right = Right Arrow (")
Jump = Z
Attack = X

Cricket 97 Win95

Whether you like cricket or not, it does make a surprisingly fun computer game. This is EA sports latest title, check it out.

System requirements: 486, 8Mb RAM, Soundcard.

In the demo, only Keyboard control is available.

Tab before the bowl = in-game options.
H = in-game help.
F1 - F3 = alter the camera view.

Yoda Desktop Themes. Win95

Be Luke Skywalker on a series of quick to play quests in an effort to become a Jedi Knight. The full version offers three distinct types of terrain, and many endings. In this demo however, you must destroy of an Imperial arms factory on the ice-bound planet Neshtab.

System requirements: 486, 8Mb RAM, Windows 95, Soundcard.

This is a Windows 95 game and is controlled using the mouse.

Once you land on Dagobah, find R2-D2, Bump into him to pick him up! Artoo is a context-sensitive help system! Use him on anything you find confusing, and he'll do his best to explain it. If he doesn't see anything of specific interest, he'll offer some general hints and tips.

• To move Luke around the Desktop Adventures world, press and the left mouse button.

• To activate floor switches, stand on them.

• To activate wall-switches and to open unlocked doors, bump into them.

• To walk into a house, hut, cave, etc., move into the opening.

• To ready a weapon for action, left-click on its icon in your inventory, then left-click on Luke.

• To wield a weapon, aim in the direction you

Drilling Billy DOS

It's the 90's version of Manic Miner - enjoy, reflect then revel in modern graphics.

Get Lost DOS

Trapped inside a 3D maze, you're LOST. Use your wits and sense of direction to escape. More then just a 1st person maze though, the levels are true 3 dimensional, i.e they go up and down. The object is to find the relevant coloured square on each maze. An excellent version of a tried and true idea.

System requirements: 486, 8Mb RAM, Soundcard.

This games supports a Mouse.

Forward = Up Arrow
Backward = Down arrow
Turn Left = Left Arrow
Turn Right = Right Arrow

Unabomber Win95

Not really a game, it was just so stupid it was crying out to be put on a cover CD. Just click the Unabomber or certain American states for bizarre results.

System requirements: 386, 4Mb RAM.

This game is controlled using the mouse.

UTILITIES

After Dark - The popular and most loved Screen saver. Flying toasters, Need we say more?

Forte Free Agent - A very popular and used News reader for the Internet. It takes a while to learn but is worth the effort. See the online help for more information.

Cute FTP - Cute FTP is an FTP client for the Internet with a twist, it represents directories and files as icons just like the Windows explorer. It also supports advanced firewalling, handy to go through proxies at your work.

Scitechs Display Doctor version 5.3 - The premiere DOS based VESA utility. It detects a very wide range of video cards and sets up the VESA modes optimised for the hardware. It's actually possible to get up to a 20% speed increase under DOS games with this utility.

Game Builder Light - Game Builder Lite, allows you to create full color, action graphic games — without programming. Game Builder Lite can be used to create a large variety of adventure, educational, historical, and fun games providing you with a set of easy to use tools for making simple or complex games. Game Builder Lite provides people who can't or don't want to program games with a way to turn their great game ideas into reality.

Home Page Builder - If you're looking for a Homepage but don't have enough time to sit down and fiddle with HTML, use this little utility to create a customised page to suit your needs.

Kremlin Encryption - Kremlin Encryption is touted as one of the best encryption methods around. Encryptions locks files up so that prying eyes can't see your data. Even the hardest hacker should be baffled by this.

mIRC - For those of you new to the internet, IRC stands for Internet Relay Chat. The IRC network is a virtual meeting place where people from all over the world can meet and talk. mIRC attempts to provide a user-friendly interface for use with the IRC network.

PKZip for Windows 3.1 and 95. - All the power and convenience of PKZip in a windows interface.

Twister Screen Saver - Have large twisters devour your desktop in this cool disaster screen saver.

Windownload - Win download will save you time and money by logging onto the Internet and downloading entire sites so you can browse them offline.

Winhacker - WinHacker 95 is a utility that you can use to configure the hidden Windows 95 (and Windows NT 4.0 with version 2.0) settings. WinHacker 95 is THE Windows Shell Management Tool.

Many of the settings that change the way Windows 95 works and feels are hidden in the overwhelming registry, or in configuration files. WinHacker 95 give you a easy way to configure those settings through the GUI (graphical user interface)!

You can rename or change the icon of any shell folder (such as My Computer, Recycle Bin). Add/Remove specific shell folders from My Computer or the Desktop. Show Windows Bitmaps as thumbnails in Explorer.

Winzip - WinZip brings the convenience of Windows to the use of Zip files and other compression formats. long filename support and tight integration with the Windows 95 shell. Drag and drop to or from the Explorer, or zip and unzip without leaving the Explorer. *Internet support:* WinZip features built-in support for popular Internet file formats: TAR, gzip, Unix compress, UUEncode, XXencode, BinHex, and MIME. ARJ, LZH, and ARC files are supported via external programs. WinZip interfaces to most virus scanners.

Patches

Age of Sail Version 1.05
Archimedian Dynasty Version 1.20
Battleground Ardenned up to v1.33
Battleground Shiloh v1.1
Blood
Broken alliance - new weapons v. 1.01
Cavewars 1.2 Beta
Cricket '97 patch for DOS v1.0
Cricket '97 patch for Windows 95 v1.0
Destiny v1.145
Discworld II patch #3
Emperor of the fading suns Commercial Patch Version 1.2
Harpoon Classic 97 Patch 1.63
Moo 2 v1.31
Update for Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle Of Flesh
The Settlers II - V 1.51
Stargunner Patch Version 1.0b to 1.1a
Steel Panthers II: modern battles read me file v1.01

DOS TROUBLESHOOTING

The most likely cause of any problem is a shortage of conventional memory. This has nothing to do with how much RAM is on your system, but how it's set up. To find out how much is available for the games, type MEM /CIMORE. Look for a line that reads LARGEST EXECUTABLE PROGRAM SIZE, if it's over 550k then everything should run. If it's under that figure, you'll need to edit your system files to sort it out.

The easiest way is to use the MAKE BOOT DISK facility found on most game installation menus. If you'd prefer not to do that, then you'll need to manually edit your two configuration files - the CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT.

To do so, type EDIT CONFIG.SYS and EDIT AUTOEXEC.BAT. In the CONFIG.SYS file, the most likely culprit is EMM386.EXE. You don't need it for the majority of games, so put REM at the start of the line. This will disable it. In the AUTOEXEC.BAT look to see if you are running SMARTDRV, if it's there, put REM at the start. These two simple measures should overcome most problems. If you're still running short on conventional memory (the game should give you an error message telling you how much more you need), then a boot disk is the best solution.

THE PC POWERPLAY CD - The games on the CD are designed to be run in different ways. Some can be run straight from the disc, while others need to be installed. Games requiring installation will usually prompt you with a choice of where it will install to, so take note! Many of the games which run from the CD will only produce sound effects if you have a Sound Blaster compatible sound card set to default settings. That's 99% of you, so if you get no sound you're best copying the game to your hard drive, then running the setup program - usually INSTALL, SETUP, CONFIG or SOUNDSET. As with all problems PC, trial and error is the only true solution. Feel free to copy an entire game to your hard drive. All games are in the GAMES directory. Also copy a game from the CD if it mysteriously refuses to install. Then run the INSTALL file from the hard drive.

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SUPPORT - cdtech@pcpowerplay.next.com.aus

Microsoft® Windows® 95 gives you the boot to kick some serious butt.

To make your games the coolest they can be, you need the boot of Microsoft® Windows® 95. Its 32-bit architecture not only lets you kick some serious enemy butt, but also gives you full-on, 3D graphics that'll blow you away. To prove our point, Windows 95 now comes with a complimentary CD sampler with 13 hair raising games. So get with the program. If it's full-on games that get you going, then it's time to feel the boot of Windows 95.

Complimentary Games Sampler available while stocks last. Available from participating resellers.

Microsoft®

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ITS COMING.....JUNE 1997

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Classification TBC

PC CD ROM

Getting it right the 2nd time

It looks like the tank rush debacle that has marred the status of Red Alert as a multiplayer game might have a fix in store. Westwood Studios reportedly are about to release a patch for Red Alert: Counterstrike that will correct some of the widely held criticisms of the game, and add-on CD. The patch will fix the 'map lock' feature of Counterstrike, so that multiplayer games will no longer require all players to have the Counterstrike CD for Counterstrike maps, add a hard difficulty level for the single player game, and also allow for the new units such as the Tesla Tank and Nuclear Subs to be used in multiplayer games - yes! One of the best features of the patch, though, will be that it will slow the speed of tank construction at the beginning of multiplayer games, which is definitely a necessary bug fix.

300,000 apply for Dark Reign beta

We first told you about Dark Reign, Activision's forthcoming title from Australian developers Auran a couple of issues ago, and it seems that the game is generating a great deal of interest worldwide. When Activision announced they were accepting beta testers for the game their website was besieged with over 300,000 applications from people in over 50 countries in just four days, and the volume of traffic generated crashed the Activision server on a couple of occasions. We can only hope that the game lives up to expectations...

sidelines

3D Realms, responsible for Duke Nukem3D, have announced that the sequel; entitled Duke Nukem Forever; will make use of Quake engine, so that it will be in true 3D. 'Forever' isn't expected to be released until sometime in 1998, but a game with the humour and interactivity of Duke3D in a true 3D world is definitely something to look forward to.

It just goes to show you what a megabuck advertising campaign can do for your product. The battle for the console market has begun in earnest both here and overseas, with Sony and Nintendo going all out in their bid to dominate the other - Sony to try to keep their hammerlock on the market, and Nintendo to trying to wrest it from them. The news isn't good for Nintendo though, with the PlayStation's dominance continuing and in some cases widening the gap, especially in England. Looks like it might be time for some late night thinking cap sessions at the Nintendo marketing department.

LucasArts have announced that their Nintendo 64 title, Shadows of the Empire will be ported to the PC sometime soon - let's hope they improve it as well as port it. Information is that it will make use of Direct 3D natively, and will be an interesting one to watch - so as to compare the games on the two platforms. We'll tell you more as it happens, but you can expect X-Wing v TIE Fighter very soon, although you've got two more months until Dark Forces 2: Jedi Knight finds its way onto the shelves.

Some good news for Flight Sim addicts; Mission Studios are almost ready to release an enhanced campaign CD for Jetfighter III. Anyone who has a PC big'n'fast enough to run JF3 will be pleased to hear that there will be 70 new missions comprised in 2 campaigns, 5 million square miles of more scenery, a new plane; the F14-D Tomcat, and the Phoenix missile as well as a few odd bug fixes too.

Still with Flight Sims, Digital Image Design have decided to integrate Super EF2000 and Tactcom into one product - EF2000 v2.0. It will include the Win '95 enhanced version, and a graphics upgrade for 3Dfx and Rendition cards - although these will only work in DOS. On top of this will be a mammoth 350 page strategy guide from Sim Tech. It's been a long (and often confused) wait for flight sim players, but EF2000 v2.0 should be out within a couple of months.

sidelines

Local distributor Sega Ozisoft have just launched their new improved website, after evaluating their log files from the past six months. Sega representatives are proudly proclaiming that they have apparently "pinpointed some trends in the site's functionality's" and decided that "users were looking for content [or] more to the point dynamic content". What that gobbledygook, otherwise known as marketing-speak, means is that the Sega Ozisoft site now contains over 200 tips, cheats and hints for PC and console games, as well as patches, bug fixes and demos. Check it out at *www.segaozisoft.com.au*

A bit of a kerfuffle between Activision and 3D Realms has resulted in a quickfire showdown of press releases. The first shot was fired by Activision, who told us that Hipnotic, the producers of the Quake mission packs, had snapped up "part of the core creative team responsible for...Duke Nukem 3D". 3D Realms were quick to fire off a response, to the effect that Activision press release was "stretching the truth well beyond breaking point - it's an outright lie". Activision have been strangely quiet on the matter since, though scuttlebutt has it that the ex-3D Realms employees might have been padding their resumes a little...

It's a sad thing, but the female of the gaming world has largely been ignored in the past. Spacetec, manufacturers of the SpaceOrb 360 game controller have at least tried to redress the balance a little by recruiting female gamers to their GameMaster team. They have been searching for committed female game players that are both keen and proficient at games such as Quake, Duke3D, descent and others. There's plenty of females that would argue that rather than try to get women interested in action shoot-em-ups game developers should be encouraged to make games designed for females, but at least Spacetec are trying.

Multiplay discounted

It's something that online gamers have known for a long time, though service providers have tended to be a bit slow on the uptake - players generally don't like time based charges for online games servers. It sucks to have to keep one eye on the clock while you're trying to duke it out with a horde of human opponents, and thankfully Multiplay are taking notice.

While they're keeping their $5 per hour deal for those who just want to take a look, it's now possible to pay a one off fee of $29.95 per month for unlimited access, and they've recently boosted their network capacity, and added QuakeWorld servers in the expectancy of a boost to their subscriber base. Multiplay can be reached at www.multiplay.com.au for more information.

Intel Inside - everything...

Not content with domination of the PC market, Intel are likely to announce a major push into the console and arcade arena very shortly. They want to introduce an open specification that would be based on the Pentium II chipset. Intel's argument (other than that it would make them bucketloads of money) is that game developers will only need to create a game for one system which could then be released to the PC, the arcades and their console platform all at the same time. This would, say Intel, save developers money in development costs, and free them from having to pay royalties to proprietary companies such as Nintendo, Sega and Sony.

It's doubted that console manufacturers are going to be happy about Intel's push, but at present they have the support of both Microsoft and Sony.

Post-apocalyptic

They're a bunch of very strange and twisted people over there at Running With Scissors - and we're sure they'd take that as a compliment. Their forthcoming title, called Postal, is causing a bit of a stir at the US Postal Office. They aren't happy about the title of the game, derived from the term 'going on a postal' which means shooting lots of your co-workers for no apparent reason, and the RWS website has summaries of some of the past rampages of Postal workers and others. RWS don't seem to perturbed by this controversy (probably because of the publicity the game is receiving), and say that the game isn't based on anything to do with the post office, or the employees - just that it does involve lots of violence and shooting, hence the title. The US Postal Service has even begun legal proceedings to stop the title being used, but it doesn't seem likely that they will be able to claim proprietary rights to the term 'postal'. The game itself looks like a bit of a Syndicate clone, but details are scarce at this time - possibly because of the fracas with the Postal Office. Only in America...

Top Ten Games

Rank TITLE
Developer / Distributor

This	Last	TITLE
1	3	**RED ALERT**
		Westwood / Sega Ozisoft
2	2	**DIABLO**
		Blizzard / Dataflow
3	9	**NEED FOR SPEED (SE)**
		Electronic Arts / Electronic Arts
4	3	***CRICKET '97***
		EA / Sega Ozisoft
5	2	**KKND**
		Beam / Electronic Arts
6	-	**TOMB RAIDER**
		Core Design / Eidos
7	6	**SEGA RALLY**
		Sega / Sega Ozisoft
8	7	**C&C (ANNIVERSARY PACK)**
		MicroProse / Sega Ozisoft
9	-	**AFL FINALS FEVER**
		Blue Tongue Entertainment / EA
10	-	**WARCRAFT BATTLECHEST**
		Blizzard / Dataflow

Week ending 6th April 1997.

The Acer best selling charts are carefully compiled from a sample panel of retailers selected across Australia including mass merchants, department stores, specialty software stores and independent outlets. Retailers surveyed include Myer Grace Bros., David Jones and John Martins, K Mart, Target, Big W, World 4 Kids, Harvey Norman Computer Super Stores, Blockbuster, Brashes, Video Games Heaven, and Games Wizards.

Charts supplied by Australian Computer Entertainment Review ACER

THE U.S. NEWS

Steven Dale Greenlee

There is a lot of activity in the gaming industry here in the U.S., but the majority of it is geared toward the upcoming E3 convention to be held in Atlanta, Georgia this June. Few games are coming out and little is being said about the games in production, because if we found out everything now then there wouldn't be a whole lot to talk about during the big to-do. Seeing how the game publishers want no bad press going into the convention, there's little juicy gossip either. Instead game companies have been merging and deal-making like over sexed bunnies.

Bloodletting horror at Disney

Following in the footsteps of Virgin, Acclaim, and 7th Level, among others, Disney has axed nearly a hundred of its 425 employees this month. Disney says they will now move away from entertainment games and will re-focus on children's edutainment.

In that same vein, Disney bought Starwave, the Web innovators behind Mr. Showbiz, Outside Online, and ESPNET SportsZone. Layoffs are expected at Starwave as well.

Wave bye-bye to Rocket Science

Rocket Science has run out of fuel of the money kind and have announced they will ceased all operations. This comes on the heels of Rocket Science parting company with their publisher SegaSoft. Although fine games, Rocket Jockey and Obsidian did not become the hits Rocket Science needed. Rocket Science president Bill Davis says, "...without a hit under our belt, publishers are reluctant to risk the funds necessary to fund development of our upcoming titles." In light of these developments a significant portion, if not all 65 RS employees will be laid off.

Rocket Science has one game left to finish-Space Bar. This is the game being designed by Steve Meretzsky who you may remember is the PC gaming god who began with the legendary Zork maker INFOCOM back in 1979.

Inscape is now Ignite

While no lay-offs have been announced the interactive CD-ROM developer Graphics Zone changed its name to Ignite and bought game maker Inscape. Now with an infusion of money and motivation Inscape may be able to kick some gaming butt. They have seven games in the works: Tales from the Crypt, a role-playing adventure based on the TV series of the same name (due in November), HyperWar, a real-time strategy game that begins in the post-WWII era and continues through time to the year 2010 (due in October), magazine a 3D racing game (due in September), Red Shift, another real-time strategy game, this time set in a post-apocalyptic future (October) and Princess Maker 2, a Japanese anima-style game where you must help a princess take control of her kingdom (July). Also in the pipeline is the sequel to the Amiga and Commodore 64 classic game, Faery Tale Adventures. FTA2, which ships in June, is an epic fantasy role-playing game and are you trying to save the world from Chaos.

In addition to buying Inscape, Ignite bought game house Trimark.

CUC Me buying up everything

The highly successful direct discounter CUC last year bought Sierra On-Line (and with them Davidson & Associates and the red hot Blizzard) and with its marketing muscle, quickly pushed Sierra to the top of the list in sales and revenues among game companies. CUC is showing that it is still interested in computer games by snapping up the profitable and hit making screen saver company Berkeley Systems recently. Berkeley made its name with the After Dark Screen Saver series and most recently for publishing the wildly popular You Don't Know Jack party trivia game. The 120 employees at Berkeley though aren't really that thrilled with the merger. Berkeley could have gone public on the stock market and in the process all the hardworking people there could have profited handsomely. Now, the only person who gets off rich is founder Wes Boyd, who in addition will be double dipping since he has agreed to hold a consulting position for two years. For about one-third of Berkeley's employees, it's the unemployment line for them, which includes President and CEO Julie Wainwright, who was the real force behind Berkeley's success. A Berkeley marketing executive has been put in charge and will report to executives at Sierra On-Line. But CUC may not be finished yet. Last year about this time Microprose was dealing with a situation. It couldn't decide what to do with Spectrum Holobyte. What Microprose ending up doing was literally transferring all Spectrum Holobyte operations to Microprose. Now, it appears CUC maybe interested in buying what's left of Spectrum Holobyte. CUC says it has started talks with Spectrum Holobyte CEO Steve Race, who joined the company from Sony in 1996 and has done a phenomenal job of keeping Spectrum Holobyte viable in the cut throat world of flight and military sims. While showing a loss in their most recent fiscal year, there were profitable quarters. Spectrum had sales of just over $61 million dollars, down from just over $80 million in the previous fiscal year. CUC is based in Connecticut and has annual revenues of about two billion dollars.

In the meantime, Spectrum Holobyte says Amy Smith-Boylan (producer of TekWar the game) is to head its Hunt Valley, Maryland production studio. She'll direct teams who will make action, simulation, and strategy games. Also appointed to brand-new positions were Steve Barcia, who was on the Master of Orion II design team, has been appointed Worldwide Creative Director, and Kevin Ray is the new Worldwide Director of Technology. Spectrum Holobyte says these two promotions will help the company think globally.

On a different note: Microprose says they have entered into an agreement with FASA. FASA is the license holder and developer of the BattleTech universe who owns MechWarrior. Microprose will design and publish five games including: Microprose MechWarrior III, in addition to two others set in the BattleTech universe, MechCommander (formerly entitled Honor Bound), BattleTech: The Elementals and two ShadowRun games. All are being developed for Windows 95. Earlier MechWarrior titles were published by Activision.

THE U.K. NEWS

Derek dela Fuente

Hi, once again from the country that produces some of the best games in the world. This time of year sees more releases than any time apart from Christmas and it really has gone crazy. Did you know for instance that Gti will release 30 games over the next 4 months on 6 different formats or that EA have 12 titles on 4 formats in the month of May alone?

Exclusively yours and yours!

The biggest news is that DMA, the company that brought us Lemmings have signed an exclusive deal called - The Best Of British, with Gremlin to produce more games. Strange though it sounds, because DMA have not had a game out for a long time even though their next title is lined up for BMG called Grand Auto Thief. With an exclusive deal with Nintendo, one with BMG, what the hell is exclusive? Oh yes and an exclusive with Gti! Now if you keep your ears to the ground then you will hear something even more interesting about DMA shortly. I cannot mention it because I will be sued, but be reminded of Peter Molyneux and the goings on at Bullfrog!

Soccer Crazy

Crush Soccer is another soccer game targeted to explode on the scene in the summer, but in the words of Sunsoft's own PR person, Max Sacchi,"this will make all the other games look feeble." You would expect any good PR person to say that, but Max is not only Italian and an avid soccer fan, but a former journalist and he knows his head is on the line, so for once you have to take notice.

Sunsoft is really starting to move into European development, and Crush, the UK team behind this game, have a wealth of experience going back 12 years. "More real than fantasy", is the quote from the development team and the screen shots from this polygon based arcade simulation certainly look impressive. Even the General Manager of Sunsoft has gone on record as stating this is the most advanced soccer game to be produced and the highly critical Japanese are not ones for overstatements! Forget FIFA and all the other soccer games, this is it! Sim, come management come arcade all in one!

Versailles 1685 - the Omni 3D engine in action.

French Fancy

Cryo have been around for a good many years and their reputation has been built by publishing companies like Virgin and Mindscape, but now they are going it alone and from the first of 5 titles this year, called Atlantis; these are some of the most impressive games seen in both graphical and story content. They have devised two technology systems one is called Omni 3D and Omni Sync. I will let their MD explain it:

It's got the look!

"The technology we are working towards, 'the holy grail', is to present a real time feel with a precalculated look and Omni 3D gives you this. It is nearer to the real thing than you have seen before. We believe you have freer movement and a more immersive feel with this new system. What you get is a panoramic 360 degree first person view with fluid movement with no loss in perspective. When you move things everything is updated with perspective correction in real time. Whether your view moves from left to right or up or down, the onscreen response is quick and smooth with spatial perspective accurately represented.

Hubble bubble

"It is hard to explain Omni 3D but the player is in the centre of a bubble and this is based on an anamorphic algorithms which means the area is calculated as much larger. We can bend this sphere/bubble and the player is always in the centre and this allows for much greater viewing and gives even better interaction with characters and objects. Even the backgrounds have a very high quality image in a real time environment! No other 3D engine currently available comes close to Omni 3D which provides full SVGA of 65,000 colours.

Lip Service

"We have also developed Omni Synch. This takes a file in any given language and produces a real time animation of a character - the face of the character, so that the lip synch is perfectly accurate with the sound coming from the person - this is real time lip synching. It permits high level accuracy for facial animation of 3D characters, especially for voice synchronisation and emotions expression. Thanks to real time animation and artificial intelligence, this engine permits the precise and effortless generation of lip and lower facial movement on the basis of audio files. This feature - combined with well conceived dialogue - helps to bring 3D animated characters alive for more immersive gaming. The great thing about this is that you can use any language and it is all perfect. Once you place the WAV files into the program it will produce it all itself. This saves a lot of time and trouble in terms of localisation. The more languages you can use the broader the base of people we can focus on and because of this we may be able to eventually lower the price of a game in countries. The cost of localisation is very expensive, so to have a program to do it for you is a big bonus. We can now look towards countries like Poland and Holland etc. People in all territories are entitled to see games in their own language". Thanks to Jean Defranc.

Beasts and Bumkins

Coming from EA, this is billed as an isometric viewed medieval strategy action game and is one that is being coded by WorldWeaver, a team of two.

The game is set in the medieval age and you are lord of the manor, called Lord Mildew. B&B is a slightly spoof game and the closest I can give is the film Jabberwocky with its zany humour and weird goings on. People may say this is a medieval version of Theme Park, and in a way it is because you have your economy, where you have to feed people, grow crops, from corn to apple trees, harvest, right down to making babies. The management side is ensuring you have a good economy and the people are happy. The game consists of over 30 missions and each one you must complete before you can progress on. Ensuring the people have enough food and that it expands on limited resources to begin with is a tough task. Whilst expanding your lands you also have to undertake daring missions to rid Lokyadore of the demon lord's evil hordes. Defeat all your opponents and demonic creatures on the entire map. The game has similar combat elements to Warcraft and the economy of Theme Park so you have 2 genres of games merged into one.

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Subscribers and renewers also get a stab at the best competition prizes in PC PowerPlay - with excellent odds too! This month's is a beauty:

The first 5 subscribers or renewers drawn randomly at the end of June will win:

A 24 carat gold plated Star Wars Collection Series X-Wing and Slave-1 (Boba Fett's ship - you know, the cool one).

Worth over $300

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The same 5 lucky winners will also get a copy of LucasArts ***X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter.***

After we've given these magnificent prizes away, we're going to draw another 5 names for the runner up prize:

5 copies of LucasArts Yoda Stories.

There you go, Star Wars and PC PowerPlay, the 2 things you really need to make your life complete and proper... DO IT!

Issue 11 Subscription winner:

VideoLogic Apocalypse 3D accelerator.

M Cope, Essendon VIC, G Arnett, Woodford NSW, M Tibben, Ulverstone TAS, D Arnold, Naracoorte SA, T Sime, North Melbourne VIC

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013

COMPETITIONS

Need for Speed 2

All entries close June 30 1997
Entries to: PC PowerPlay
(Name of Comp)
PO Box 634
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Dog Day

On page 51 you can read a review of Dog Day. We suggest you do, for this AUSTRALIAN game is a thoroughly excellent graphic adventure. Dark, sinister graphics and a storyline that's both freshly original and compulsively playable. In other words - it's a top game.

You can win a copy. Thanks to Impact, the game's publisher, we have 20 copies to give away. The first 6 names drawn will ALSO win a stylish Dog Day T-shirt and cap. How good is that!

Q. In what country was Dog Day developed?

Need for Speed 2

Hurtling around a mountainside in a million-dollar exoticar with little regard for life or law is GOOD FUN. We know, we've done it, and so can you. With Need for Speed 2 you can drive outrageously cool cars in a stunningly beautiful 3D world. Read the review on page 40 to find out more. Electronic Arts want you to experience this rare and special joy, so they've given us 6 copies to give to you.

Q. Name 2 of the cars you can drive in Need for Speed 2.

Interstate 76

Last issue we reviewed this truly brilliant game experience. We loved it and so will you. 93% is what we gave it, actually. Now you can win one, thanks to the generous folks at Activision.

6 are up for grabs, so, enter and you could win one, which, this being a competition and all, is how it works.

Q. What's the name of the character you play in Interstate 76?

Zombie Wars

Zombie Wars is a happy little platform game that'll run on just about any old PC. It's fun and unpretentious and it was developed right here in Australia by those hard working lads at Sprint Electronics. Read all about it on page 62. They want you to share the fun - which is what we like to do with fun around here, as well as have it, of course. 10 copies are waiting to be one.

Q. What game is Zombie Wars the sequel to?

Last Express

Quality adventure games are making a comeback. Rich gameplay and original graphics make Last Express one of the better adventures going at the moment. We review it in this very issue. Dataflow are the distributors and are friendly folk too, so, 6 copies landed on the PowerPlay desk with a note saying: "for PowerPlay readers". Well, hopefully there are more than 6 of you, which means... A competition!

Q. What classic platform game was the developer responsible for?

Issue 11 winners:

DIABLO
J Rogers, Narangba QLD,
G Metcalfe, Coffs Harbour NSW,
M Angrish, Meadow Heights VIC,
J Parsons, Croydon NSW

KKND
J Cromm, Glendon QLD,
C Bailey, Redhead NSW,
P Slattery, Avalon NSW,
K Millbank, Whyalla SA,
C McInnes, Bacchus Marsh VIC,
G Brown, Kelmscott WA

EF 2000
J Burchell, Morphett Vale SA,
R Taylor, Liverpool NSW,
A Townsley, Northgate,
J Cromm, Glendon QLD,
T Dyer, St Albans,
J O'Connell, Bunbury WA

PHANTASMAGORIA 2
K Nolan, Comberwell VIC,
R Wong, Cessnock NSW,
N Gamble, Lesmurdie WA,
B Hall, Whyalla SA,
T Fairbank, Cobar NSW,
P Plummer, Molesworth TAS

MS DEMO CD + WIN 95
B Payne, Bowral NSW,
S King, Heatley QLD,
G Young, East Seaham NSW,
D Brook, Port Willunga SA,
A Pitchford, Leopold VIC,
E Tomaino, Wangaratta VIC,
J Barrett, Ridgehaven SA,
G Donovon, North Rockhampton QLD,
B Reynolds, Toongabbie VIC,
M Pisarskis, Noranda WA

MS DEMO CD
M Laing, Pennant Hills NSW,
P Marciano, Alfred Cove WA,
A Coleshill, Manly QLD,
B Miladinovic, Burrong NSW,
R Hall, Kingswood NSW,
S Macmillan, Thornton NSW,
A Gazzard, Wavell Heights QLD,
N Boyle, Victoria Point,
I Mitsklburg, Ashfield NSW,
D Cristo, Concord West NSW,
Saunders, Vincent QLD,
A Garth, Ballarat VIC,
M Glenville, Edens Landing QLD,
T O'brien, Lawnton QLD,
R Walker, Alelgate SA,
S Lightfoot, Bateman WA,
B Templeman, Kardinya WA,
K McLeod, Milton QLD,
C Morgan, Karake QLD,
B Liddle, Maleny QLD

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Screenshots shown

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Unravel an intriguing story including multiple endings.

Play a wide variety of challenges seamlessly integrated into the story and environments.

Use an "install" camera to take photos for gathering clues.

available on PC and Mac CD-ROM

Screenshots Shown

MYERS - GRACE BROS - DAVID JONES
HARVEY NORMAN - DICK SMITHS
AND ALL LEADING COMPUTER ZONES

A game's impression on people always seem to be based to their past experiences with other games. People often come back to good games after trying out new ones on the market. There are those you find new versions of, or the updated (match your new-beaut machine) editions; producing a few enhancement or a change in gameplay. Then there's Quake.

the ever-changing face of QUAKE

Quake Engine

As soon as Quake loads on to a PC, it can be customised even beyond the menu options that appear in the start of the game. It provides a command line console for on-the-spot changes including game configurations (ie. video modes, network setups etc) down to running other pre written add ons, much like basic 'batch' and 'config' files. There are a few die hard techno-oriented people that have gone past the 'off-the-shelf' Quake; to customising these config files and creating their own maps. Much like Doom players of the past who concocted utilities to the delight of other enthusiasts revelling in their unofficial creations. But then there are those that have gone even deeper.

Pak man

The games' complex platform has attracted disciples of internet-programming-gamers to an extent only a few can grasp;. the original game didn't have too many files to start with, since the developers at Id incorporated most of the game in 2 massive files known as pak0.pak (normally over 18 Megs) and pak1.pak (normally over 34 Megs). Known to an enlightened few, is the fact that these files can be unpacked, edited, recompiled then packed again to change the game's overall look and feel. A programming language known as QuakeC holds a significant role in modifications made on these data files. And to make it user friendly, the written subroutines were simply placed in subdirectories of recoded libraries, packed into separate pak files then rebuilt. A few extra parameters added to your DOS Quake execution initiates the engine to read these new files and start a whole new set of extra features known as 'patches' to the game.

Patches and patches

The very first unofficial patch made for Quake was when the game was in its alpha testing. The game then could only be played in Deathmatch mode on the first 3 levels - until someone found the way to bring out the long awaited monsters. That happened within 24 hours of the Alpha Test being released onto the net. Since then patches have been made by anyone who thought 'what if...'; and of course, possessed the skill and initiative to put their creations either on bulletin boards or web sites. By net surfing one could easily find a patch that suited their whim:

Homing missiles and grappling hooks

Patches were made to cater to those with interests and cravings for carnage, like the patch that increases the violence portrayed in the game. This is actually a tweaked programming module that created 'spewing blood' in the gameplay. There's a patch that lets you shoot homing missiles which was ripped from the subroutines that made a Shalrath/Vore fireballs follow a target. The most used, unique to Quake, weapons patch would be the grappling hook patch. This weapon lets a player obtain a utility which is a cross between Batman's grappler and a Ninja's flail.

Fancy dress Quake

'Skins', as the name infers, are the actual textures that wrap around the entities in the Quake 3D world. They can be changed with utilities that modify the graphics stored in the 'player.mdl' file within the pak files mentioned earlier. With this ability, gamers are allowed to play within themes of their choice; from Star Trek to Star Wars. If you ever fancied playing a Storm Trooper and killing a Predator - this is your patch. Groups of Quake players banding together, internet-known as 'Clans', have actually drawn their own to fully identify their groups' presence in Quake challenges.

Bot to die for

With hackers having full control of entities within the game programming, artificial intelligent companions they soon brought out a new line of patches called artificial intelligent companions, or 'bots'. It started out with companion dogs -

then with a bit of skin change a 'cujo' patch was been created. It didn't take long for people to then create bots that would be used as human players that substituted the absence of the real thing. Companion bots would aid you in either single player games or full deathmatches - complete with skin themes. Artificial Intelligence programming played a great part in the various 'bot' offerings. A 'bot' known as 'Zeus' would even chat while continuing along on its precise killing spree.

Internet extras

Like most new games; Quake is internet ready. But Quake being reprogrammable as it is, one should not be surprised to find a multitude of creations, devices and services that make Quake a full internet gaming platform. The most prevalent are machines that act as servers for Quake games on the internet. Quake 'off-the-shelf' has a built-in option to log on to these servers. And there are sites, internet-wide, that promote these 'Quake servers' as an extra feature to their site or service as an ISP.

And then there's Quakeworld

Everyone who has played Quake on the net will initially begrudge the fact that this fast game is so slow over such an exciting medium. Then there are a defiant few that have experienced the joys and advances of the term 'Quakeworld'. Quake servers running this version of Quake will require gamers to logon and use Quakeworld client software that enhances TCP/IP usage. Thus, a faster if not near to 'stand-alone Quake' quality of gameplay. Advancements made with Quakeworld have been revolutionary in the internet gaming community. Aside from being fast, a server can hold 32 players in one game, have stats showing on-screen for any player, clan skins are incorporated; and with an ongoing and record keeping account for anyone on the server. A front-end was created known as Qspy that works the internet and finds normal Quake and Quakeworld servers for perusal, or to immediately play on. Qspy pings a server and finds out how many are playing, who, what color their using, how well you ping with server (how fast your game will be), what type of Quake (keep reading for further info), how long they've been on, what map, how many kills,... the list goes on.

Capture the Flag

Meekly known by its abbreviation, CTF (Capture the Flag) is the coolest way to play multi-player Quake. It's a very team-oriented, action-packed experience that once you start playing, will cause you to soon forget FFA Quake (Free-For-All). A team (either red or blue) has to capture the other team's flag, and bring it back to your flag to acquire points for the team. Complete with eight maps unique to the game, it lifted the gameplay to new heights. Combinations of patches, including the 'grappling hook, and tons of people converting to it has prompted a Quakeworld version. So popular it is, that the game has a 'bot' being offered on the internet known as CTFbot.

Team Fortress

TF a.k.a. Team Fortress was made popular by its 'campaign' qualities for those that used to play role-playing-campaign-series-type games. It pits two teams to follow certain missions of varying strategies, according to the map their played in. But each member of the team can assume a certain class of soldier, ranging from scouts to heavy weapons guy; and abilities from sniper to medic. It has added a complex twist and a range of diverse weaponry that appealed to the Dungeon and Dragons gamer of old. And, like CTF it has produced internet servers and noteworthy Clans to hail the games' team orientation.

Superheroes

Superheroes of Quake lets gamers be a bunch of superheroes trying to annihilate each other. Complete with skins and sets of superpowers that can be chosen from the start. It allows players to mix various extremes that the Quake engine would equate as 'Super'.

Shrak

Shrak for Quake came out early this year and boldly achieved a true conversion of Quake. A gamer plays on a totally different theme, new monsters, new weapons and new maps. The game is being commercially sold in the states; but already has a CTF version.

Quake chess

Imagine playing Battlechess on PC, with Quake monsters and in full dynamic 3D - that's what Quess is all about. Launched as a preview of things to come from the Quake engine, it is now on its 1.03 version which can be played over the internet. Its creators plan to demonstrate the capabilities the Quake engine has offer through a project known as Quake Rally - the name speaks for itself. Also in the books are plans for Quake hockey and Quake soccer.

Roberto Sebastian

Capture the flag

More capture the flag

Quakerally

Shrak

Quakespy

Playing in a Blue Lagoon

JEAN-MICHEL COUSTEAU INCORPORATES SAVING THE OCEANS INTO A GAME CALLED THE SACRED MIRROR OF KOFUN.

For many years television was his way to promote conservation and sensitivity to the world's oceans. No longer, Jean-Michel Cousteau says the way to ocean awareness is through the computer and more specifically, through CD-ROM games. The 58 year old Cousteau is the oldest son of famed oceanographer Jacques and for many years was the producer of all his father's National Geographic television specials - The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau. But for the last two years Cousteau has been pointing his production company toward cyberspace and the creation of CD-ROMs.

"Rather than focusing on killing and violence and ugliness and whatnot, which is a lot easier than anything else, we've decided to be as entertaining, to be as mysterious and by the same token present beauty and facts of life and we believe in addition to having a lot fun and being entertained and going on an adventure, they can learn something," says Cousteau.

The Sacred Mirror of Kofun is set in the South Pacific and combines underwater exploration, a Japanese myth, World War II history and high tech science. In short, the story came out of World War II that a young sailor had stolen a mirror, which would protect you from death, but unfortunately, the young sailor's ship, was sunk. In this case, the game story line also incorporates elements of Amaterasu, the Shinto sun-goddess.

The game is set in lush underwater arenas filmed especially for this game by Cousteau, as well as on the land. "then the player, he explains, would be drawn into the adventure and danger of diving just like he experiences and have been experiencing since he was seven years old diving with father. So, in order to find that atmosphere which you or I could feel as we were playing the game, Cousteau took his film team to the South Pacific island of Truk and Palau. His film team included several veteran divers from the Cousteau Society and the game's main writer, Jean Montange.

Cousteau says the film shoot was not only fun but spooky as well. "Because you're talking about different grave yards there. Where you have over 65 vessels and submarines and airplanes which had been sunk during World War II (in one battle, ed.). And many, many of these vessels are still carrying the remains of some of the sailors and all the munitions whether it's bombs or hand grenades or tanks or cannons and find munitions all over the decks of some of those vessels. You go in the captain's suite and you find some of his personal belongings. It becomes very, very emotional as you make each discovery."

At one point during the filming Cousteau was in an old sunken war ship when suddenly the roof began caving in and the old ship started to shift. This is the danger Cousteau wants gamers to feel as they are playing the game and doing their own virtual dives. He says everything you see in the game video is real, unrehearsed and spontaneous. Spontaneity is important here because Cousteau says that he was looking for film much different than what he had produced for his other CD-ROM, CITIES UNDER THE SEA.

(ABOVE) THE BRIDGE CONTROL DECK OF YOUR SHIP, THE ANTARES. (TOP) JEAN-MICHEL COUSTEAU.

"Rather than focusing on killing and violence we've decided to be as entertaining, to be as mysterious and by the same token present beauty and facts of life

"...CITIES UNDER THE SEA was a lot more educational and it was done with that in mind," he says. "It was simply looking at the reef as a city and showing that it works like a city and works better than a city. But the basis of it was to inform the players. In the case of Kofun we wanted to make a game. We wanted to make it fun. We wanted to make it serious and we wanted to give the sense of danger because we go through that all the time. Obviously, when you're on expedition, when your on adventure there are things that happen which are unpredictable and some of that does happen during the course of Kofun."

Cousteau says that they relate the surprise of things happening by filming it as it happens as in the case of the collapsing ship and putting on the CD-ROM as part of the game footage. This incorporation of real-life into a computer game does not in any way dilute the fantasy of playing the game. There are several components which you, as the gamer, can use to dive deeper into the gameplay. First you have the Antares. This is the VR version of the Calypso, may she rest in peace. It is filled to the brim with high tech gadgets including E.D.W.A.R.D., a holographic computer. For diving you have the Angel Shark, which is a one-person wet sub. One thing you'll find out quickly is that E.D.W.A.R.D's encyclopedia is a real one based upon Cousteau's terrific Encyclopedia of the Sea CD-ROM.

Not only are there lots of gadgets, but there is a supporting cast as well. The lead character support is played by none other than Cousteau himself. He says that he is an "intricate" part of the show because he wanted the player to feel something of the adventure he has experienced in all these years of diving. This feeling includes, Cousteau says, "...having a team of people with the player and be challenged and challenge him or her at the same time as we go through our adventure." Other team members include Paul Sinus-a narcissistic genius, Luciana Capucci-an Italian marine biologist, the beautiful Ann Fong-an historian and Steve Grant-an environmentalist. You will interact with them in an engaging and entertaining way.

Cousteau isn't wasting anytime. After taking care of some business with his "green" resort in Fuji, Cousteau is now formulating his next game, and of course, it is based in fact. He says that he wants to do a story in Belize and the mystery is figuring out the connection between Belize and the rise of the myth of mermaids. In meantime, The Sacred Mirror of Kofun is now on the shelves of your favourite software store. Or it is available from publisher Enteractive. Their Web page address is http://www.enteractive.com. And just what is the mystery behind the Sacred Mirror of Kofun? Well, I think the answer will surprise you.

Steven Dale Greenlee

Microsoft® Windows® 95 gives you the boot to kick some serious butt.

Serious studies by serious people with degrees have shown that computer games are cool. To make your games even cooler, you need the boot of Microsoft® Windows® 95. The 32-bit architecture not only lets you kick some serious enemy butt, but also gives you 3D graphics that'll blow you away and a bad case of white knuckles. To prove our point, Windows 95 now comes with a complimentary CD sampler of 13 hair raising games that will get your blood pumping.

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FRONTLINE WGPCP

Constructor

Category	Strategy/God Sim
Players	1-4
Publisher	Acclaim
Available	September

Virtual Council Worker. Build a town, maintain it and watch the happy townsfolk go happily about their business.

There's something about God sims that just grabs us in tight and keeps us there for ages. Maybe it's got something to do with the utopian scenarios - the perfect city/hospital/brick/etc can be created, if you just take enough time and plan far enough ahead, or maybe it's something simpler than that - maybe we just like being able to rule everyone else in the game. 'What? You want a raise - get the hell out of my hospital!' or 'I'm sorry madam, I'm going to demolish your house for a railway station, and there's nothing you can do about it. Sucked in.'. Well, that's probably enough about our idiosyncrasies, but if you haven't managed to OD on God sims as yet, then this one looks pretty promising.

Construction doesn't look all that dissimilar to others of that ilk, you're cast as a Real Estate developer who's task is to build up an empire of real estate bigger and better than anyone else. There are a number of different goals that you can set for yourself; either accumulate enough money to be able to buy Rupert Murdoch, or buy everyone elses property so that you own every building in the world, or create a society where everyone is happy and content. One of the most promising aspects of the game looks to be the skulduggery that's encouraged. It's not a single player game, instead there's four other opponents in each scenario (either AI or human) and you have to battle them, as well as property costs. But, rather than straight out financial competition, you can hire 'undesirables' to go and annoy your opponents, including hippies (presumably they chain themselves to the opposition bulldozers), psycho clowns, burglars and mobsters to name but a few. Construction, the game, looks to have a huge range of depth, a sense of humour, and plenty of playability - as well as multiplayability. This could be the one we've been waiting for, fellow megalomaniacs.

Fallout

Category	Strategy/RPG
Players	1
Publisher	Interplay
Available	August/September

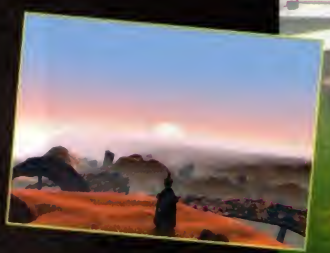
Fallout's landscape art is truly gorgeous, while the gameplay pleasingly follows the Little-Guys-Running-Around-Shooting-Each-Other genre.

For die hard RPG-ers, as well as those with even a passing interest in the genre, this looks like it could be a biggie. Fallout will be an RPG game, in the same style as Crusader or Diablo, shot from pretty much the same perspective. In a nice twist to the usual RPG fantasy worlds of elves and dwarves and people with really silly names (Gawain Blackhead, Throgmoor Dogbiter and the like) Fallout is set in a post-apocalyptic world where mutants and survivors are the only things left on the wasted planet. It was originally based on the GURPS style engine, but contractual problems with GURPS creator Steve Jackson that changed all that. Anyway, Interplay at least sound confident that the game will be just as good, if not better than if it were produced with the GURPS engine.

Some of the main features of Fallout are going to be the turn based combat system, so that combat is more of an art form that a rapid clicking fest, and allows for damage to specific body parts. There looks to be a nice array of weaponry too, hotguns, flamethrowers, chainguns, rocket launchers, sledgehammers, and brass knuckles to name but a few. The weaponry might hint at the nature of the game, which is definitely targeted at a mature audience - Interplay advises that Fallout will include graphic violence, drug use and nasty language. Cool! The problem is that thanks to the decidedly unenlightened Pollies that decide such things, there is the possibility that it's going to be locked in kiddie mode, and that the mature game players of Australia will be treated like children once again. It does look like it's going to be a fantastic game though, with plenty of the scope and free play that is essential for an RPG, even if there's only going to be a single player mode. One to look out for - and keep an eye out for a full review as soon as we get our hands on a copy.

RISING LANDS

COMING SOON



Actual Screen Shots

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Voodoo Kid

Category	Adventure
Players	1
Publisher	Infogames
Available	July/August

From French outfit, Cryo comes Voodoo Kid. A kid's game, the adventure should captivate many adults too.

Those French people are pretty damn weird. Ok, so there's this Kid who is reading a book one night about some big bad Voodoo dude called Baron Saturday. Bored with the book, he falls asleep only to wake up... you guessed it, in the Baron's world. He's on the Baron's ship actually, and the KID (he's always in capital letters, don't ask why) who make his way through the Baron's zombies and assorted other minions to get in control of the ship, so that he can steer it away from the Island of Lost Souls. The Island is where the Baron plans to keep the souls of the children he's stolen, while he turns their bodies into zombies to serve as his slaves. I dunno about you, but when I first read the intro, I couldn't help but think that they must get some pretty cool psychotropic drugs over there in FranceLand - and the dark and surreal (yet funny) feel and look of the game doesn't hurt this assumption either. Ah well, enough about that, it's a kids game after all - and I'm willing to bet that the kiddies might just enjoy it, whether they're French or not. And while they may be weird, the Frenchies do seem to be aware of political correctness - at the start of the game you have the choice of playing as a female or a male which is a nice, enlightened, touch.

It's from Infogrames, who were responsible for Alone In The Dark, so the pedigree is good, and while the intended audience is different for Voodoo Kid there is a similar kind of feel to the game. Infogrames have used motion capture for the animation, and it's been used to good effect too. The graphics look very nice, and is a fully three dimensional world (so they say), though the game takes a 2d perspective. A simple point and click interface, and fairly relevant puzzles to solve makes this one a good adventure game for the kiddies, whether they're weird and twisted or not.

Warlords 3

Category	Strategy
Players	1-8
Publisher	SSG
Available	July/August

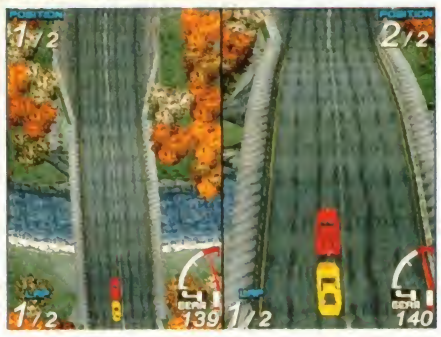
The Australian-developed Warlords series has a deservedly cult following.

It's been a few years since Warlords 2, and even longer since the original. They were both excellent games, and the only thing that was really missing from Warlords 2 was multiplay - well, there was hotseat play, but that sucked, and PBEM play but that was a pain. Still, for a turn based game it did seem to lend itself to a multiplaying environment rather well, and with Warlords 3 it's finally here! It's not really turn based anymore though, Warlords 3 is going to have real time moves for multiplay (we're not quite sure how they're going to do it though), but network, online and modem play are all going to be a part of Warlords 3 - up to eight players on a network, and that's nothing but good news. The gameplay doesn't look all that much different from War2, the graphics have been spruced up into an nicer style of SVGA, and are very pretty but other than that it still seems like pretty much the same game, with a few neat little additions here and there. A map editor, for starters, with enough detail to satisfy even the most anal retentive person out there - pictures of the heroes can be imported from .pcx or .bmp files, fully configurable units, bonuses, terrain, and just about anything else you could think of. There's also more scope in the Warlords universe than before, with a large variety of maps and scenarios, as well as difficulty levels too. It's always good to play an Australian game, and SSG have been making good strategy games for a long time now, and Warlords 3 looks like it's going to be another one to add to their world class collection. Expect it to be on the shelves somewhere around September this year.

Speedster_

Category	Racing
Players	1-TBA
Publisher	Psygnosis
Available	July

No guns, no power-ups - just pure street racing in sexy hi-res. SVGA.



It's purely about racing, the blurb loudly proclaims. And it is, there's no weapons, no power ups, no nitro injections no nothing except you and the directional keys and a few other competitors. Yes, it's a top down racing game, where you race around eight tracks in one of fifteen vehicles. Why they proudly proclaim it to be a top down racer though, is beyond me because as every serious racing enthusiast knows first person mode is the only way to go for a 'proper' racing game. However, is does look very nice indeed, with light sourcing and gouraud shading implemented well. A pretty set of graphics does not a good racer make though, and the beta we had a look at was (to put it mildly) less than adrenaline pumping. Because it's a more serious type of racer, without weapons or the like, the driving model needs to be either accurate or exciting, and it's neither at the moment really. Having said that, it was only a beta that we were looking at, and if the final product is speeded up and refined considerably then the claim that Speedster 'is sure to keep your adrenaline pumping' might become a little more accurate. A fun and 'adrenaline pumping' car racing game that's about nothing more than racing without being overly concerned with the minutae of details such as something like GP2 could be a winner, we'll just have to wait and see the final release before we can judge Speedster properly.

3D

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Carmageddon

Category	Driving action
Players	1-8
Publisher	SCI/Hillard Corp.
Available	July

Sports cars with razorblades, monster trucks with guns, pedestrian fatalities - what more could a driver want?

There have been countless attempts, but no game maker has managed to fully capture the subtleties of the Car As A Deadly Weapon genre. Sure, Interstate 76 came close, but there were too many funny bits in that game. Car Combat, Road Rage - call it what you will, it's a serious thing and only Carmageddon treats it with the straight-faced seriousness it deserves.

Normally a car's handling is given scant attention by programmers of this kind of game. Not this one, Carmageddon features highly accurate 3D physics. That's what the makers say, anyway. It feels right though, with the tracks wild and wacky enough to put any outrageous manoeuvre to the test. Much like the equally amusing Fatal Racing, these tracks ask that you perform some serious acrobatics to stay a contender. Full loops, jump ramps that spin you through a 360 degree twist - even gridiron stadiums where your razor-blade equipped vehicle of death bloodily dispenses with any player foolish enough to get in your way.

Yes, this game has it all. It's a fun and funny car combat game with 36 big circuits. Upgrade your car from the shop, venture off-road if you feel so inclined - no pesky invisible trackside walls will try to stop you, move up through the 100-strong ranks and even swap your car for that of a damaged opponent mid race!

Unfortunately some extremely amusing blooded-pedestrian graphics may see the Australian version tamed a little by our friends at the Office of Film and Literature Classification. It was looking a bit dodgy at the time of writing - so if the pedestrians don't explode in a horrific mess of intestinal fireworks in your full, local version, then write to your local member, for you have been had!

Full review next issue.

F-16 Fighting Falcon

Category	Combat Flight Sim
Players	1-16
Publisher	Digital Integration
Available	July

Spectrum Holobyte's Falcon 4.0 may someday be released. It's now over 2 years late and MAY be out by the end of this year. Hardcore combat flight simmers have been living for Falcon 4.0, but in the meantime they'll need something to satiate their needs, or the consequences could get ugly.

Hurtling over the horizon at mach 2 comes F-16 Fighting Falcon from Digital Integration. These are the people that originally hit the scene with Tornado, an absolutely perfect sim which is still the most under-rated game of its genre. Apache Longbow and Hind followed, and now comes F-16. Digital Integration's approach to combat flight sims is unique and F-16 looks like a winner. Their terrain graphics are comprised of very solid polygons in SVGA. It will be interesting to see if the 3D engine can handle the high altitudes an F16 will fly at. DI's previous sims were all low-level affairs, where the terrain only popped up at relatively close distances - up high where you can see for miles is a different story, and the SVGA graphics may be taxed as a result.

F-16 will support a full 16-player LAN. This should finally see Falcon 3.0 and EF2000 put to rest among network squadrons everywhere. DI's campaign structure is the weak link. Three scenarios (Cyprus, Korea and Israel) will have a set mission structure and sequence.

Head to head with Falcon 4.0, DI's F-16 will take off first.

Past DI campaigns have only included 15-20 missions, so let's hope they put more effort into F-16.

3D support is not finalised, although the development team's machines are all equipped with 3D hardware and they are looking at whether to go with support for specific chipsets or Direct 3D.

We're looking forward to this one A LOT and a full review shouldn't be far off.

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ANDREW SPENCER IS A GAME DEVELOPER

The making of Ecstatica 2

Go back 10 years, Andrew Spencer was the programmer behind one of the biggest selling soccer games ever - International Soccer on the Commodore 64. Since then, he's done nothing apart from Ecstatica (E1), which received much acclaim, partially pushing him back into the limelight. Over the last 2 years he has formed his own development group of five other personnel, with Andrew doing all the programming, Marcus Wagenfuhr, a director and background designer, with three animators plus one other background artist. Everything is done in-house in a small office from their base in Islington London, with only the music being coded out of house. At present ASS are putting the final touches to the sequel Ecstatica 2 (E2). I tracked Andrew down to give us the low down on his current project.

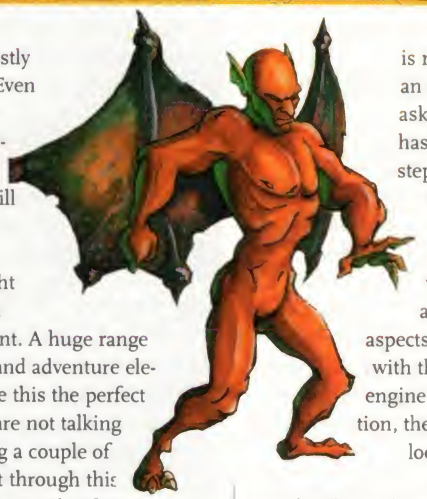
Andrew believes his company's expertise is based on games with character, with full interaction, that brings them to life via their animation. Also creating a development base that allows creative input from all the people involved in the game is essential. "We are trying to make a certain type of game that will convey interest, we are not into racing games, etc. and presenting a character based game with movie like qualities is our main focus", commented Andrew. There is a strong spirit to Andrew's work in that he wants his games to go beyond other games bracketed in the same mould, to produce and creative a medium to formulate a new genre of action, 3D adventure experience. Trying to make Ecstatica 2 more immersive with a total 3D look is just one focus. One area that is avoided is not falling into the interactive movie trap that many other developers do.

Having complete control of the character with full interaction is one of the most important aspects, which was conveyed with a forceful manner by Andrew and his team.

Ecstatico 1 took five years to make, so what has been your objective for the follow up and what of the new range of hardware specs?

(Andrew) The first program had various short falls in terms of the size of the game and even the gameplay. We have certainly addressed those problems.

(Marcus) There was criticism that Ecstatica 1 did not take long to complete and making E2 bigger and more involved was, of course, one objective. It is now ten times as big as the original presentation and also the difficulty level of gameplay has been vastly improved. Even down to more intelligent monsters that will come back again and again to fight sees a rapid improvement. A huge range of puzzles and adventure elements make this the perfect blend. We are not talking about taking a couple of hours to get through this but at least a couple of weeks - at least 50 solid hours of play. Knowing when to stop relies on knowing that you feel good about what you have done but having strict development time and also having filled up 1 CD is also a good guide.



(Andrew) The code for E2 are enhancements from the E1 engine. We now have high resolution, new effects, transparent ellipsoids, shadows, etc. Since the first game the technology of the PC has improved. We are now working on faster machines but E2 will not utilise the new range of 3D cards mainly because our engine creates characters via 'ellipsoids' and 3D cards are more for background presentation. We have our own way of advancing technology and believe this is a better option via software rather than hardware. The base machine will be a P133 but it will work OK on a lower machine in lower resolution on a DX2. Designing a game that is scaleable in technology so if you have a top range machine you will get the best possible experience but if not you will still be able to play the game in a slightly different form. One thing we try not to do is to think about the technical side too much, you must have good ideas, it is a 50/50 breakdown, whereas many people rely too heavily on clever techniques. Look at a game like Rayman, that was perfect. The guys moved on in terms of technical features but they also ensured it had solid gameplay. Technology allows us to do more things but it is not a means to an end. You might ask if a developer has to stay one step ahead with their expertise. You must always be innovative but there are many aspects of a game, with the AI, the engine, the interaction, the puzzles, the look, it is mixing them all. We are shortly reaching a point where the technology will become less of a major factor and once every game has the same specs it will revolve around the actual game design and content. With our batch of tools we have written for Ecstatica we present a very unique game.

So where does the inspiration for E2 come from?

That is my area. I have played role playing and shoot-em-up games for years. The secret rooms were always a fascination, so I started building a story and environment from past experiences. It basically got bigger and bigger as my ideas formulated. Talking with the animators I was also able to get some good ideas. I began by roughing out a story and environment on paper and then placing it onto computer and building on it.

Why the sequel?

(Thomas) We did start working on another game Urban Decay, which we experienced problems with. The sequel seemed to make sense. We felt we could build on the storyline and extend the characters and environments. The next game will not be E3, maybe one day but it is back to working on Urban Decay which has a really different setting.

E2 is an action based adventure, so how difficult have you tried to make the combat?

(Marcus) It is as simple as testing the game with a lot of people. A lot of the team are NOT into fighting games so if it appeals to them and they do reasonably well in a combat situation we know we are moving along the right direction. We are able to produce complex animations very fast and so changing fighting scenes is easy. We reached a point where some of the team wanted more fighting and some more adventure which was a good sign. The hardest aspect is to get the whole blend of the game balanced - the adventure with the puzzles and the combat.

A brief overview on Ecstatica 2 and its uniqueness?

(Thomas) It looks like no other game out there. Graphically it is very rich with lush backdrops and appealing characters. The controls of the game have really been improved over the first game and so ease of movement and manipulation is good. The interface is designed to be free of menus and icons, for basically you have a full screen and if you pick things up you see that being done, you do not get a great big frame of an object in a hand. The game is free of cut scenes and you are in total control.

(Andrew) There are over 60 characters in the game and so there is always something new to find or explore. The variety from one location to another is very different with over 900 rooms.

The game continues on from E1 and you will find the castle overrun by the demonic horse and find out that an ancient sign, the elder sign, has been broken and you must find the bits and put them together. It is a game of explorations, solving puzzles, finding people and objects with full interaction. It's really save the universe and find the girl. In total there are 7 points you must pass in order to fulfil your quest but it is in no real order. There are lots of sub plots but it is up to the player to choose what they want to do, the game does not nudge the player in any direction, only hints from a priestess (via a voice) The game is very open and not linear. We steer clear of storyboarding but do make sketches.

Concept sketches and their final realisations. Note how the ellipsoids give personality to otherwise generic sketches.

CONTINUED OVER...

WHAT'S IN A GAME

"ELLIPSOIDS" Explained.

(Marcus) There is a dictionary meaning for Ellipsoids, but basically it is made up of circles. When you see games like Alone in the Dark you have people with straight lines and it doesn't look correct, this method is to make all the rounded corners and not have jagged edges. The idea has come from the way cartoons are made up with rounded shapes. There are no straight edges on a body, if you had enough triangles you could get it right but with Ellipsoids you can get a good look easily. Most games have polygons. Ellipsoids have been pushed even further in E2. In E1 the characters had 20 ellipsoids with a few triangles, now with high resolutions we have 46 ellipsoids which gives the character a more realistic and defined look. The ellipsoids are very nice. It must be added that the traditional animation skills we have used have really brought the ellipsoids to life which makes the characters come to life, we have steered clear of motion caption.

(Thomas o'Flaherty) You must have a really powerful engine to move your ellipsoids and be it using polygons or triangles as we do. With triangles we believe the characters look more natural - organic.

(Andrew) It took me a good few years to program the ellipsoids which needed a lot of maths to make one ellipsoid to appear and I do not know why other programmers have not gone the same route as us. It certainly gives us a unique look to the game.

A game like Little Big Adventure is isometric and doesn't look like my game, and as for Alone in the Dark, this is vastly different. When people start doing things better than us then I would worry. I certainly would not like to write a platform game for then you would have to come up with something different. The ideas and techniques in the game are strong. We have certainly learnt from seeing other games of a similar type. The ellipsoids feature is just a tiny facet of the programme.

Looking Good!

One aspect we have tried to convey is a sense of realism and this is shown via the gestures of the cat within the game and this is where Ellipsoids come into their own as opposed to the rigid use of polygons. Body movements look real and reactions are smoother and more precise, the look is more natural. The look is certainly more of a cartoon style than the rigid look of Alone in the Dark. (Andrew)

Consoles and the future.

Machines like the N64 have their place in the market for people who want to play games instantly. The PC in terms of technology will soon be ahead of the N64 but the cost of a top range PC is very high. Consoles have limitations with memory. Go ahead 2 years and the PC will have moved so far ahead of the console that most people will eventually buy a PC. We would like to have console versions of our games but there are two things that go against it, one is our games have an adult theme and also the technical limitations. (Andrew)

Sound effects and music.

The music and sound effects are VERY important and we have a team in Liverpool doing them. We have made the music fit the mood and it is atmospheric and will change pertaining to what the character does. It is very hard to continually change the music to fit the situation. The music is a very important and integral part of the game and this has been worked on in great depth.

Derek dela Fuente

Background info

Andrew is 34 years old and his only previous game of merit was International Basketball from Epyx, yet again on the 64. He has no formal coding training and is self taught. Although having one of the biggest hit games on the Commodore 64 in International Soccer he has put his hands to many things including pop videos and worked with Captain Sensible.

The seeds for Ecstatica were sewn well over 10 years ago and the game took 5 years to make.

Thus Spake Andrew Spencer:

"At present I find the development software more interesting than hardware."

"We alsa have other ideas revolving around Sci fi."

"I guess if I had written Doom I could have had some neat backdrops!"

Music "I like a bit of Jungle Music and House Music... Nathing special."

"A good adventure game shauld be challenging and large enough ta be able to work through at a nice easy pace, never too hard. Pulling in the player is done via lats af things going on in the background with lots of new events happening as you wander around."

"You do nat have had to have played E1 to get into E2, it is a stand alone game."

"I have nat had much time for pleasure. I draw a bit.. da yau want ta see some af my sketches?"

"I am more interested in making interactive stories. Even if yau have the best story/film in the warld you have to turn it inta an interactive project and at present no one has gat the formula right so I concentrate an working in this area. It is nice to use yaur awn ideas and imagination. A game is more different than a book, than a film ta a game."

"We are moving towards my gaal af fashianing a new creative game medium. Adventure games can become even more interactive with more realistic characters in the way they behave, more immersive. Mare mavie like visually without the FMV."

"There is a LOT going on in Ecstatica 2. Yau have hands an contral as to where you are going within the huge game warld. Having fancy graphics is not enough, but I have not seen many ather games, all I know is that there are many objectives. We have written some nice routines for the CD ROM so that lots of the contents will go inta memory. You will see no jerky screens and everything will look fluid."

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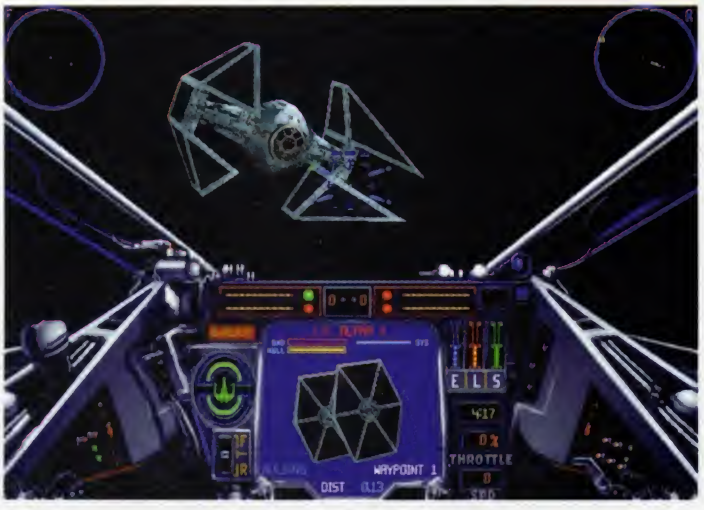
David vs. Goliath in space. The gigantic Imperial Star Destroyer through the cockpit of an X-Wing

X-WING VS. TIE FIGHTER

It's Star Wars, it's LucasArts, it's the ultimate internet combat sim and you can play as either the Empire or the Rebels. It's X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter and it's absolutely bloody fantastic.



(above right) An X-Wing suffering rear-deflector damage. (right) You're too close! Pull up!... Collision imminent with a TIE interceptor.

Authentic Star Wars craft are well represented. Here a rebel Blockade Runner prepares to repel Imperial boarders.

I first met Han Solo in Space, approaching a small planet in the Halitosis System, it was about 2 years after the Emperor's death. He was being chased by a dozen angry fighters, friends of Jabba no doubt, which I generously took care of while he made his landing approach. Later that night in a small bar on the dark side of Halitosis III we got to talking. "Well, Chewy and I have been searching the galaxy for two years now" he said, eyeing me carefully. "I know it sounds like an impossible dream but, one day, we hope to find a place where Man and Wookie can be together, without fear of recrimination, prejudice or guilt" It was at this point that I woke up, realised that I'd spent the last eighteen hours playing X-Wing vs TIE Fighter, and promptly collapsed back into a coma. But it was a good coma.

No-friends mode too!

It's been a long time coming, but I'm sure no one minds too much now that it's here. X-Wing vs TIE is more than just a combination of LucasArts' earlier Star Wars titles - it's a whole new experience with a new 3D engine, built from the ground up to support multiplayer play. In fact, it was actually ready for release last November, as a pure multiplayer experience, but wiser heads at Lucas decided that some single player elements were needed, hence the delay.

This modular approach gives the game a bit of a split personality, with some of the single player game modes working differently to the way they do in the multiplayer game. There is no campaign game as there was in the older X-Wing and TIE Fighter games, just a set of varying mission types. In fact, you could say that the single player game is really only there as a training ground to prepare you for the multiplayer scenarios, just so you don't get your ass kicked too badly. To this effect, Lucas have tricked up their AI programming remarkably. Your (computer) opponents now act in a much more human way and are much tougher than they were in the earlier Star Wars games.

So many ways to play

To get you into the swing of things, X vs T's developers have included some 'Exercise' missions, "Take out the target drones at nav point ..." Etc. There are different ones for Rebel and Empire pilots. In the multiplayer game the 'exercise' missions are a good way to learn how to fly in formation with your buddies, watch your wingman's tail and coordinate your attacks most effectively. Here you can also set up 'Historical Missions' (hey kids next time you're in history class, try asking your teacher about the Jedi

Ha Ha! Taking revenge on Han Solo for stealing away Princess Leia

Taking on three TIEs. A hard task considering your Y-Wing is a slow bomber.

Plus

The only way is MULTIPLAY

X-Wing vs TIE is a thoroughbred multiplayer game, and if you still don't have access to the Net, especially if you're a Star Wars freak, there's no better reason than this to get hooked up! Lucas Arts have set up "Rebel HQ" located at http://www.rebelhq.com from where you'll be able to connect to the Lucas Arts area on the Microsoft Gaming Zone to find games with other people. The first time you log onto the Gaming Zone you'll have to register and download two bits of software, one is 2.2 Mb and the other is 900k or so. This won't take long, and basically prepares your machine to use the site most effectively. Once up and running the X VS T area in the Zone will list all the games currently running and their state of play. Lucas, for technical reasons, have opted for a non dynamic approach to multiplayer games. In other words you can't join games that have already started. A game host starts a 'briefing room' and when the room has enough pilots in it, the game may begin. Available rooms will show up in green to tell you that they're joinable. Of course you can just play with a friend over a modem but the more pilots the more fun, an eight player LAN game would be the coolest!

Knights contribution to the Crusades). When you're done with training, it's time to party. Melee missions are designed for instant, ferocious action and by instant I mean that if you don't have your 'stick pulled hard over and your fingers on the shield controls when the game starts, you're toast! If you're after something with a little more depth, the Tournament option groups either three or five melee missions together, with the purpose of finding out who is the best overall pilot. Tournaments also allow you to team up with either a friend or AI pilot to compete against other teams. If you're a traditionalist you'll find what you want in the 'Combat' and 'Battle' scenarios. Combat missions are your standard goal oriented "Destroy the Imperial Sex Palace" type thing, and can be flown from either the Rebel or Imperial point of view. To take this one step further 'Battles' organise three, five or seven Combat missions into a campaign with the best two out of three, three out of five etc. winning the door prize.

Custom missions

All of the scenarios can be reconfigured in a number of ways from their setup screen too. An example of what you can do would be having two Rebel and Two Imperial pilots, each with AI wingmen, flying in competition. The Rebels

I have you now... Eliminating a sentry X-Wing before going to work on his floating spaceport.

Know your starfighter!

Unfortunately the Star Wars universe isn't blessed with a huge variety of space craft to choose from, but each of the flyable types represented in the game have their own personality and must be handled accordingly to prevent undue embarrassment. Of course, all of the TIE models are here, the Standard, Interceptor, Bomber, Advanced and the new five door hatchback, also included is the Assault Gunboat - a heavy bomber type craft with a formidable array of beam weapons and lots of missiles. The TIE's are easily the most delicate ships of the two fleets, having no shielding (except for the Advanced model) and little armour protection. They are very manoeuvrable however. Rebel pilots fare slightly better, as their X-Wings, A-Wings, Y-Wings and Z-95's all have shields and thicker hulls than the Imperial vessels, they are the preferred choice of beginners and cowards alike. As well as the standard lasers and Proton Torps there are also some interesting weapons at your disposal here. Tractor beams can be used to slow and stall an enemy, making him or her a sitting duck for your missiles or lasers, while Jamming beams prevent other ships from using their weapons - a bunch of fighters using these can neutralise a capital ship, allowing bombers to come in and cream it with ease!

TIE Interceptor.

Y-Wing Fighter

TIE Bomber

X-Wing Fighter

might have the goal of destroying certain primary and secondary targets while the Imperial pilots job is to stop them. Points are awarded to each side for completing their objectives (or for stopping the enemy from completing theirs) and the points tally at the end of the mission decides the winner.

There were a few things about the game that pooed me off when I went for the test drive. Energy management is too critical for my liking, it's far too easy to get carried away blasting at some poor fool, only to run out of juice and be left stranded with no weapon in the middle of a battle. Realistically, no fighter with an energy supply this limited would ever get off the drawing board. The other thing is the lack of a leading gunsight (!) which, to me, seems like an amazing omission. Our puny technology has had such things since the sixties.

Overall though X-Wing vs TIE is an impressive game, one which will be played for a long, long time and in the end that's what counts.

George Soropos

PC PowerPlay GOLD TOP 10%

93%

Category	Space combat
Players	1-8
Publisher	LucasArts
Price	$89.95
Rating	G8+
Available	Now
For	Great graphics, fast engine and absorbing gameplay... lets you be part of the Star Wars universe!
Against	Needs a lot of commitment from the player, no true single player campaign (some may see that as a plus though)
Need	P100 (Single Player) P133 (Multi) Win 95, 16Mb RAM, PCI graphics,16 bit sound, 28.8 kbs modem (Multi).
Want	P200, fast graphics card and a 'stick with four buttons and a hat.

STAR TREK GENERATIONS

Star Trek fans will love this unconditionally, while normal people will also get something out of this epic - question is, what?

First-person mode.

Getting system information and plotting navigation courses.

Another Star Trek game? The majority of you already know where you stand in relation to this title. The Trekkies will get this one even if it plays like drinking borsch through a straw, and love it. Then there's the other end of the spectrum, where there are those that despise anything Star Trek related. This may be partly due to previous Star Trek computer game experiences - quite a few of them had questionable playabilty. These people will avoid this game even though it may play beautifully. That's the consequences of producing a blockbuster series tie-in: some people with either love it or hate before even getting a chance to play the thing (this can work in the developers favour of course). But what about we middle of the road gamers? We that neither love nor hate Star Trek, and are just looking for a great game to play and keep us company till the next big thing rolls along?

FMV for atmosphere.

Film plot is game plot

Star Trek Generations (the film) has been out for years now, so the storyline will be familiar to many. Captain Jean Luc Picard receives a distress signal from a research station orbiting the Armagosa sun. Rescuing its inhabitants, Picard is made aware that one of those beamed aboard was a Doctor Tolian Soran, a person that had been rescued 78 years earlier from a similar fate. Soran, obsessed with re-entering the Nexus (a sort of galactic nirvana), will stop at nothing to do so, even if it means the destruction of planets and life. As a sort of "ghost" crew member of the USS Enterprise NCC 1701-D, you must take part in a chase amidst the stars to locate Dr. Soran and end his potential terror. Yeah, it does sound a bit constipated, but then again, it is taken straight out of the film.

Exploring the virtual Enterprise - virtual Picard.

3 gameplay styles

As previously mentioned, there are three distinct types of gameplay in STG. The first type is that of strategy, and is played out in the Stellar Cartography. Stellar Cartography is a sort of huge, seemingly 3D map room which has stored in its memory all charted stars and solar system. From here, with the advice of Data (ship operator and science officer, android too) you scan the surrounding systems for any hints or clues regarding the whereabouts of Dr Soran (I would've preferred, as would've many others, to be able to do this from the confines of the bridge). Arriving at a "hot spot", Picard will send one of the more adept members of his crew to the transport room, so they can be beamed aboard ship or planet to further investigate. In STG however things are a little more dynamic. Each function that can be performed in Stellar Cartography has a time value attached to it. Simply scanning a system costs one stardate unit. Travelling to another destination uses the most time, at ten star date units. Even changing from galaxy view to system view uses time. Time

The first-person mode adds a compelling new element to the game for Trekkies.

The planet of the Toga people.

affects the game in that the longer you spend chasing up leads the greater the chance is of Soran doing some real damage to a few couple of solar systems in his way. This will also affect the order you approach some missions.

When beaming a crew member into one of the many facilities found in the game (automatic when arriving at a mission hotspot), you begin the second type of STG gameplay - the away mission. The away missions are the bulk of STG's gameplay, and playing these will provide the most enjoyment. The away missions play very much like either System Shock or the Ultima Underworld series, that is, first person 3D action with a very strong adventure undertone. For example the first mission requires you to beam aboard the Armagosa star research station and recover the survivors of the attack. Playing as Commander Will Riker, you are armed with your communicator, a phaser (while you will shoot people, this is not a Doomy-type game), tricorder, and rigid Star Fleet protocol. Each mission has an ultimate goal, and solving it will take plenty of effort. While the graphics are fairly impressive (some parts are awesome), the overall effect of the game engine here is far from jaw-dropping. Half of the screen is taken up by your inventory and status screens, so only about half of the window is the actual game environment.

You wondered why they're called Little Green Men.

Battling behemoths

The last area of gameplay in STG is tactical combat. Travelling to and from star systems will invariably bring up against hostile enemies, which you will of course, want to blow out of your way. This is the least enjoyable section of the game. Sure, a ship like the Enterprise can't exactly dogfight, but ship to ship combat here is sooo dull. You have status displays and the option to control the battle using standard commands, but it doesn't capture that unique sort of Star Trek feel of being on the bridge, receiving a multitude of situation analysis from the crew, then ordering to "fire the proton torpedoes!".

Dotted throughout the game is plenty of story related FMV. Taken straight from the movie, STG also has new footage for fans to pour over. Next to developing the storyline further, these do well to tie up the different types of gameplay in STG. Yes, STG uses the voices of their characters respective actors (like Patrick Stewart, William Shatner),

A room with techie stuff in it.

and the audio/visual side is highly polished. The only problem is that it is lacking is some areas. The tactical combat is something only a Trekkie could love, and the away missions to will provide much more thrill if you are a fan of Star Trek.

March Stepnik

Plus

http://www.microprose.com

83%

Category	Adventure/Strategy
Players	1
Publisher	Microprose
Price	$99.95
Rating	G
Available	Now

For Challenging adventure, and a highly polished game with a strong Star Trek feel.

Against The interface in the away missions are a little rigid, and the tactical combat section is a turn off.

Need P120, Win 95, 4XCD ROM

Want P166, Good video card

NEED FOR SPEED 2

Unbelievable supercars, a gorgeous SVGA 3D environment and all the right multiplay options - gentlemen...

NFS 2's new 3D environment offers increased speed and greater detail. no word yet on any 3D version...

Gunning your Ferrari F50 down the open highway at speeds in excess of 300 clicks, you can't afford to blink. Glancing in the rear vision mirror shows that pesky Ford GT90 closing in quick. The GT90 goes for the overtake just as you both approach a crest in the road. Not surprisingly, at these speeds both Super Cars immediately go airborne upon hitting the hill. Adrenaline racing and praying for a safe return to Terra Firma, you gape in horror at the semi-trailer which is approaching head on and lays right in your landing path.

Real world physics

Using an oncoming truck as a landing pad for your $800,000 Ferrari is only one of the exciting moments in Need For Speed 2. Picture yourself powersliding a Jaguar XJ20 down a treacherous pass in the Himalayan Mountains, or clocking 200 KM/PH on the Sydney Harbour Bridge whilst avoiding Volkswagen Beetles. The concept of "You and an exotic car against the normal driving world" first appeared in the original Need For Speed and was immensely popular with it's excellent driving model that successfully combined arcade and real world physics. NFS2 sticks to the same principles as it's forebear, but as with most sequels beefs everything up. Bigger faster (and more expensive) cars, completely new tracks and a new "Pentium only" graphics engine. A moment of silence please for our old gracious 486's bless their hearts, may they RIP.

The essence of both NFS games are the Dream cars. First time around the cars ranged from the "nearly obtainable by mere mortals" Toyota Supra Turbo to the "millionaires need only apply" F40 Ferrari. NFS2 raises the ladder by concentrating on extremely exotic prototypes and limited edition cars that only Oil Barons are seen driving. Whilst VERY fast speeds are involved here, they are on the whole much more difficult to control than the cars found in the original NFS. Initially, throwing a heavy Jaguar XJ220 or its equally heavy counterpart the Isdera Commendatore 112i into a typical corner will result in crashes a plenty. It soon becomes easier, and catapultIng these beasts around a circuit successfully will satisfy the driver in you. Thankfully the Mclaren F1 and the Lotus GT1 are much better behaved in their on road handling, and have an easier learning curve.

Fast, expensive cars that can't be totalled. Oh yes.

Choose either the realistic dynamics mode or go nuts with arcade handling.

Aussie outback track

Complimenting the big and bad cars are six large and challenging new tracks on offer. Those wanting twists and turns are well catered for on all the circuits, especially the nightmare Himalayan track. For those slightly allergic to the brake pedal, take the good old Aussie outback with its wide open roads. The courses are all well designed and all offer a variety of road surfaces and troublesome spots to contend with.

Gone are the days of being unable to venture off the track as was the case in the original. NFS2 contains much more of a versatile and open driving environment. Whilst there are still some barriers stopping cross country free for alls, you are able to zip across small sections of grass fields in an attempt to short-cut or overtake. Be warned though, keeping a 350 horsepower Lotus GT1 under control while sliding on grass is... exhilarating to say the least. Crashing, which I seemed to be very practiced at, is as visually spectacular as ever. The "No damage" rule is carried over from NFS1, time being the only penalty for even the most chaotic of collisions.

(above) Hi-res vs. (below) Low-res.

Connoisseurs of the expensive cars on offer will be happy to know that NFS2 contains a visual encyclopedia that is easily on par with the first game. Another touch of realism is the ability to configure gear length, spoiler and brakes giving you that added feeling of control. No GP2 complexity here, with each area only having three settings, but the difference it makes to the car is noticeable on the track.

Split-screen mode

The usual multiplayer option of Network and Modem are available. While Network owners can run a game from one CD, modem owners still have to shell out for two copies of the game. Making up for this is an impressive split screen mode, that has you and a friend bumping shoulders in an attempt to run each other off the road.

In-car mode. Pity no one's holding the steering wheel.

While it is no doubt an excellent title, NFS2 comes at a cost. The Ninja Pentium 133 you purchased a while back is going to miss a few beats when processing all the goodies on offer. Switching to Interlaced graphics mode (tiny black lines running across the screen) on my P150 achieved a comfortable frame rate. While playing with reduced graphics will put many people off, it speeds up the game considerably for anything short of a P166 with a burning graphics card and really portrays an excellent feeling of speed.

NFS2 will not disappoint fans of the original. While the extra speed of the new cars leans it more towards an arcade racer, EA have managed to maintain a "real" sense of handling and car behaviour. A real treat is in store for racing fans who whack on a pair of headphones, pump up the volume and as they say... hit the road.

Peter Sharpe

Plus

www.nfs2.com - Home of NFS2 on the Web. No news yet on if a patch for 3D accelerator cards is on the way.

A mystery -A secret car and track are available for those skilled drivers who insist on winning numerous races.

PC PowerPlay GOLD TOP 10%

90%

Category	Racing
Players	1-8 (Network)
Publisher	Electronic Arts
Price	$89.95
Rating	G
Available	Now
For	Excellent driving model. Tracks will not be mastered overnight. Burnouts in a $500,000 car Mmmm...
Against	Getting full performance, with all graphics on will require a computer able to leap tall buildings at a single bound. Keyboard control is adequate but will frustrate some.
Need	P90, 16Mb RAM, 4 x CD, Win 95 Direct X 3
Want	P166, 32Mb RAM, Good graphics card. Thrustmaster steering wheel.

OUTLAWS

The enhanced Dark Forces 3D engine goes west for some wild action.

It's not spectacularly pretty, but it can be plenty of fun to play.

There's something slightly disturbing about the plot behind LucasArts' new Wild West flavoured shoot 'em up. It concerns revenge murder, that morally loathsome idea which sadly enjoyed some sort of revival last year thanks to several pretty dubious Hollywood films. Now, while murder (of the massacring hordes of generic monsters variety) is the staple diet of many games, and you would hardly bat an eyelid over wasting a hideous chainsaw-wielding ogre in Quake or a single-mindedly brutal Terminator in SkyNet, I must admit to have felt a little uneasy as I set out on the first level of Outlaws. It's a credit to the skill of the designers that the scene setting introduction provoked this sort of reaction, and very refreshing to see the definition of "adult themes" being stretched to include something beyond gratuitous titillation or shlock horror.

James Anderson is the star of the game, and it is into his tall, skinny black boots that you step by placing the CD in the drive. James was once the Marshall of the tiny frontier town of Sanctuary, but has now retired to spend more time with his family. This peaceful life has recently been shattered by an evil, money-hungry land baron who wants to turn Sanctuary into a big city and build a railroad straight through your farmhouse. Two goons are sent by the baron to "persuade" you into selling up, conveniently arriving minutes after you have left to do some shopping. Seizing this opportunity, they threaten and assault your wife (the intimation is that she is raped) before setting fire to your property. Unfortunately, you return only in time to - in a moving moment, set against the burning homestead boiling the twilight sky - comfort your wife as she dies in your arms. James stares defiantly into the distance and vows to gain his revenge.

You killed my wife you dirty varmints! I want revenge!

Almost 3D

Shame then, that the actual game reverts to type and is essentially Doom (but not quite) all over again. Yes, Outlaws is a first-person action game. It has, in fact, been designed around a slightly enhanced Dark Forces 3D engine. This means that, although there are rooms within and on top of each other, it's not quite true 3D. All people and objects and 2D sprites, for instance, and they don't look the best either. The numerous types of gunslingers inhabiting each level often seem too short compared to their surroundings, and while they appear detailed from a distance, they really pixellate badly when you get close.

Having said that, though, the 800x600 graphical resolution is very attractive. There isn't a tremendous amount of variety between the levels (the towns, especially, get a bit samey after the first three or four), but the sheer good looks of the buildings is enough of a distraction to make you overlook what would otherwise be a failing. All in all, leaving aside the excellent cut-scenes, Outlaws is marginally

Work faster! The trains' a comin'!

Little house on the prairie.

Smoking cigars can damge your health - so can holding lit dynamite for too long.

The third scene, onboard the train. Could have been better.

below, say, Duke Nukem 3D in terms of visual appeal.

Plus
Visit LucasArts at www.lucasarts.com
OUTLAWS
YOU GOT A HANKERIN' FOR REVENGE?
CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD THE EMO AND MULTIPLAYER UPDATE!

Spaghetti western action

There are at least three ways to play Outlaws. The first, called the Main Game, follows the story set out above. You, as ex-Marshall James Anderson, journey from town to town pursuing the bastards who killed your wife and destroyed your livelihood. After tying your horse to a handy nearby tree at the beginning of each level, you step inside the town walls and cannot leave until all the bad guys have slumped melodramatically into the dirt like they were an extra from Bruce Willis' Last Man Standing. Inside each town you'll find the anticipated array of buildings - the saloon, the bank, the gaol, the barns, the hotel, etc - which you can explore to your heart's content, in any order you wish, seeking goons to feel the wrath of your six-shooter. I amused myself enormously by recreating scenes from old spaghetti westerns - shooting out a window, leaping through the shattered glass, diving beneath a table, taking out a poorly-accented Mexican with a cheeky shot to his knees, standing up again, hurdling the bar and surprising the boys in the back room with a bloody collision between a couple of shells from my sawn-off shotgun and their heads. Departing from this routine, however, is the third level. This takes place on board a moving (I hesitate to use the word "speeding" in this context) train, but this sort of thing is the exception rather than the norm - and isn't done all that well, anyway.

Oh no! It's a drab blocky spritey thing! Heellp!

Wanted Dead or Alive

The second way of playing is the Historical Missions. Here you learn how James became the man he is today, as you have to start as a lowly Associate Deputy and gain promotion to Marshall. On the wall outside the Sheriff's office is a collection of Wanted posters that act as a kind of level select. After choosing a particular poster you then have to track down the "outlaw" on it and kill them, despite the fact that it says "Wanted Dead or Alive". These levels are more traditionally

Pretty scenes, and imaginative level design.

Doomey than in the Main Game, more straightforward and linear, but certainly no less enjoyable for it.

Modem, Network or Internet play is the other option. This is simply a straight shoot-out and is, needless to say, a lot of fun. But even if you don't have access to the multiplayer game, then I recommend playing on the "Ugly" difficulty level (and, yes, the other two are indeed "Good" and "Bad"). With you being unable to withstand more than two or three hits (less if at close range) before dying, you have to adopt far more cunning tactics. Plenty of sneaking around, crawling under windows, hiding behind crates, sniping from the roof, etc, in other words. When played on this setting Outlaws is almost a completely new game.

If you really let yourself get into the spirit of this game, then you will have a terrific time.

David Wildgoose

78%

Category	Action
Players	1-4
Publisher	Lucasarts
Price	$89.95
Rating	MA15+
Available	Now
For	Cool Wild West atmosphere. Lots of levels and different options. Amusing speech and fantastic music.
Against	Somewhat outdated graphics. We've seen most of it before.
Need	Win 95, P60, 16Mb RAM, 4xCD
Want	P133

THE LAST EXPRESS

A train, a murder, evocative 1920s atmosphere and a fresh and original graphic style.

The people are real, turned into line drawings and coloured. We're not sure about the parrot though...

Does the name Jordan Mechner mean anything to you? It should. He was the creative genius behind 1990's ground-breaking action game, Prince Of Persia. This title was so important to PC and Mac gaming because of its revolutionary animation technique, which portrayed the characters to such a vivid degree of realism that it remained unsurpassed until only about three years ago. He's done it again with his latest project, you know. The difference being that, while Prince Of Persia was essentially a fairly straightforward platform game, The Last Express is a remarkably ambitious adventure thriller set aboard the final trip made by the Orient Express on the eve of World War I.

Traditional classic thriller

You take on the role of Robert Cath, a young American doctor with a mysterious background. As the game begins you are in Paris, on the run from the police across Europe and wanted in connection with a murder in Northern Ireland. Tyler Whitney, an American friend of yours, has offered you a chance to escape to Constantinople on the Orient Express, which you accept gratefully. Arriving mere seconds after the train departs, you manage to sneak on board thanks to a well-timed leap from a speeding motorcycle. But the trouble doesn't really start until you find Tyler sprawled in a pool of his own blood on the floor of his compartment.

What the hell do you do now? Obviously, you cannot report the death to the guards or the police, you're still a wanted man after all. So, in the traditional of countless classic thrillers, you decide to dispose of the body, assume Tyler's identity (you do look quite similar, thankfully), and attempt to track down his killer. Several conversations with your fellow passengers later, you discover that Tyler was acting as middle man in a very delicate arms deal between a traitorous German and a group of Serbian rebels. And what does the strange Northern African man travelling in the private carriage, who can only be addressed as "His Excellency", have to do with it? Or what about the intense young Russian communist-idealist? Or the attractive, touring Austrian violinist? The amiable English businessman? The young Russian girl and her sick, mad grandfather? The already precarious tension that escalated so dramatically following the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand in 1914 is detailed brilliantly in this microcosm of Europe enclosed within six carriages

French stereotypes in action.

How nice a cappucino tastes when you've got a suitcase full of gold at your feet.

Nice toga, but did you kill my friend?

No, no! Anything but that!

Beautiful and stunning scenery.

Pretty ladies with silly hats.

hurtling across the continent.

This game has - oh yes! - atmosphere. It's in the immaculate recreation of the old train itself, exactly as it existed 83 years ago. With the grand, elegant wood construction, the Art-Nouveau paintings and sculptures, the precise "tch-click!" as doors open and close, the wonderful rattling and "Chug-chug-chug-toot!" sounds, it's easy to forget that you're sitting in front of a monitor and not making the journey yourself.

Incredibly effective graphics

It's in the stylishly animated characters (it's Jordan's thing, you see). Actors were filmed performing all the conversations and general walking up and down the thin corridors of the train. This footage was then dumped onto computer and subjected to a process called "grab-face", which turns everything into simple, but accurate, black and white line drawings. Next, these frames were filled in with fairly basic slabs of colour. The result is incredibly effective. Although each person appears quite primitively drawn, minimally detailed like a cartoon, they actually move very realistically and with great fluidity. This simplicity also means that there can be many characters moving around on screen, with you simultaneously guiding your character amongst them.

For the most part, you see the game world through the eyes of Robert Cath. Venturing along the walkways of the train is achieved via the usual Myst-style point-and-click arrows. I love the way you make eye contact with the other passengers when you pass them in the corridor, stepping aside with a polite "Excuse me". You can overhear many conversations while you wander about. In fact, it's often a good idea to eavesdrop outside people's compartments to possibly pick up a vital clue. When Robert enters a conversation himself, the action cuts to third-person scene (though, because the graphical style is identical this is a seamless transition). You can't make any dialogue choices, but I didn't mind - I was too busy piecing together the, at times, elusive plot and trying to work out just what each character was up to.

"Touch my man again and I'll blow your brains out!"

Classic gameplay

The most original aspect of The Last Express - and what makes it more than just a very good adventure game - is that it is played in real time. The train is relentlessly drawing nearer to its final destination, the clock is constantly ticking. Unlike most adventure games, where only your actions can trigger the passing of time, here they have no such effect. What they do is alter the actions of the other characters. Each person has his or her own agenda and motivations, so how and, significantly, when you act will affect how everyone else does. Jordan Mechner claims this means the script is constantly being rewritten as you play - and, you know what, he's not far wrong.

Throw the dead guy out the window.

Plus

www.broderbund.com

There are numerous "endings" you can reach - not all of which result in you being killed or arrested. I've just completed a game in which I duped both parties in the arms deal, before making off with a suitcase full of gold when the train arrived in Vienna - I was last seen sipping a cappuccino in a pleasant streetside cafe. Unfortunately, since I failed to uncover Tyler's murderer, I'm heading back to it right now to see if I can get any further. This is best adventure we've seen since Broken Sword.

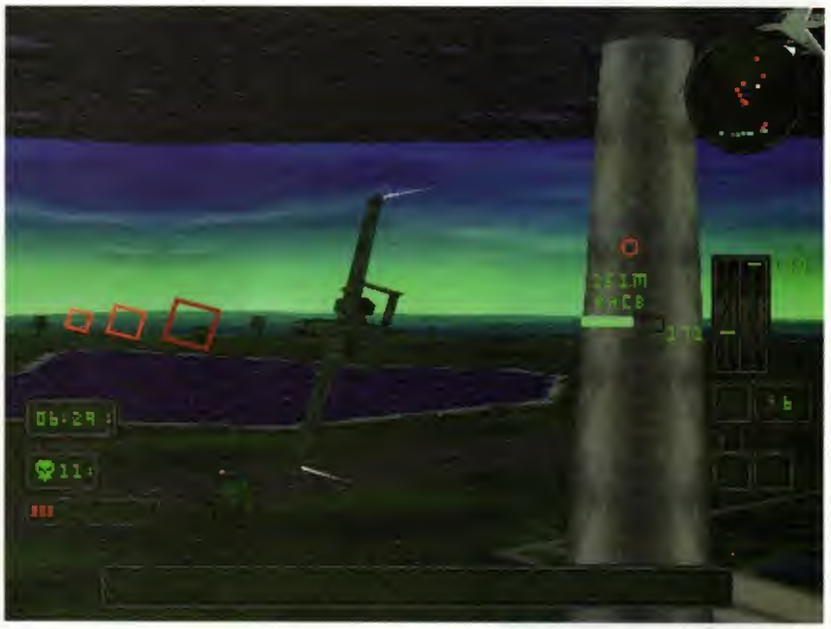
David Wildgoose

88%

Category	Adventure
Players	1
Publisher	Broderbund
Price	$89.95
Rating	M
Available	Now
For	Utterly engrossing cinematic thriller. An "adult" game in the best, mature, intelligent, thoughtful sense.
Against	Adventure purists may not appreciate the occasional "action" sequence, but I liked them.
Need	P60 (Win 95), 486DX2/66 (DOS) 8Mb RAM, 35Mb HDD, 4 x CD
Want	16Mb RAM

INDEPENDENCE DAY

The Biggest Movie In The Whole Wide World Ever makes the transition to a pleasant little shoot 'em up game. Got a 3Dfx yet?



This time, it's not a Mac you'll need, but a 3Dfx.

It had to happen, there wouldn't be a single game playing soul around that didn't believe the box office smash hit movie Independence day wouldn't become a computer game. The question remained however, what kind of game it would be, and whether it would befall the same fate of so many other movie licenses that had become really poor games.

Like the number of differing opinions about the movie, not everyone will like the game. Except now the entertainment value isn't based on personal taste, but on how much 3D acceleration your machine has. You see, Independence day has support built in for ALL the popular 3D cards such - as the 3DFX, Rendition, Permedia 3D Labs and the Matrox Mystique.

Afterburner 3D

Independence day is a totally unashamed 3D shoot em up. It's essentially a more complex Afterburner, with much better gameplay and far superior fully polygonal graphics.

Essentially, you play a pilot taking on the Alien destroyers around the world. There's no waiting for a virus to be delivered like in the movie, instead, you have to destroy Generators littered around the Alien destroyers until you can eventually destroy the primary weapon within a time and weapon limit.

To Independence days absolute credit, it perfectly simulates the frenetic fight scene within the movie when all the Earth fighters took on the Alien fighters. On the 3Dfx, the alien ships will all buzz around you incredibly quickly making you feel like you're in an old bi-plane instead of a modern jet fighter and even your missiles have to struggle to catch up to them.

Without 3D acceleration though, you're going to lose that feeling. On the normal PC version, to allow the processor to keep up, you're only ever going to see about 4 enemies on screen at any given time where the 3Dfx does about 10.

There's plenty to do in Independence Day, more then just blasting aliens. Quite often it is necessary to take out particular targets. Making bombing runs on ground targets whilst alien fighters are zooming around everywhere and gun turrets on the destroyer are blasting at you - is challenging fun indeed.

Fresh Prince included!

To aid you in your blast fest is a wingman who constantly radios back information and advice. Fans will be pleased to know that the voice is Will Smith's, the lead actor from the movie. Also to assist is a large C3 that in real life would provide JTIDS info, in this game, it seems to be just there for looks, though in one mission you do have to protect it.

A sensible design makes for good arcade fun.

Powerups a plenty also feature in Independence Day. You have to collect them in clever places on the playfield, such as through gulleys or in Paris, through the Arc d' Triumph. Powerups include extra missiles, "health" for the aircraft, Changing main guns to alien lasers, freezing all aliens for 15 seconds and different aircraft to fly with their own unique characteristics. Also scattered around are warp tunnels that take you to bonus levels.

The aliens also have their share of differing weapons. There are ships that fire straight lasers, tumblers, that when hitting your plane send it spiralling wildly out of control and ground batteries that can climb buildings.

3D acceleration

3D acceleration makes such a big difference to a game, particularly this one. So to help you, here's a brief summary on what to expect based on some common configurations:

Pentium 133, 16Mb Ram, No 3D Acceleration.

Independence Day probably isn't for you unless you absolutely loved the movie and must have all associated items. The graphics are squalid and ugly, flicker off into the distance and aliens jerk by instead of zoom by. You don't get the sense of being surrounded by superior vessels, but it's still playable.

Rendition (3D Blaster, Screamin' 3D)

Getting better, all objects and textures are now bi-linear filtered (smoothed) and explosions are translucent giving a nice see through effect. The game runs faster and is an enjoyable experience.

3Dfx (Orchid Righteous, Diamond Monster)

The best version, all the quality of the Rendition version (bi-linear and translucency) + MIP Mapping and twice the speed making it silky smooth. On a 3Dfx, Independence Day is a buzz and an adrenaline hit.

Jere Lawrence

85%

Category	3D Shoot em' up
Players	1
Publisher	Fox Interactive
Price	$TBA
Rating	G
Available	Now
For	Fun fast gameplay. Varied interesting missions and lots of activity around you Recreates the fight scene of the movie really well.
Against	Need some beefy hardware to get full enjoyment from it.
Need	P133, 16Mb RAM
Want	Any 3Dfx-based video card

M1A2 ABRAHMS

Like submarine simulations, tank sims have been a difficult genre to implement successfully. We're getting very close though...

Your gunner is targeting a T72A Tank while you are scanning with the CITV and are currently looking at one of your other M1a2s firing.

Interactive Magic's M1A2 Abrams is a gaming simulation that permits the tactics affectionado to shape the battlefield, close with and kill the enemy using firepower and manoeuvre. Abrams is a native to Windows 95 game and includes all the standard features that we have come to expect from modern combat simulations such as "Instant Action", campaigns, modem, network and Internet play. There is also a section detailing M1A2 History complete with video footage.

Action or management

Once you have selected a campaign from the Persian Gulf, Bosnia or the Ukraine, you must then select the rank you wish to wear. A Lieutenant commands a tank platoon of 4 tanks and participates in an all arms "Company Team" commanded by a computer Company Commander. As a Captain, you command the Company Team and other vehicles allotted either permanently or temporarily under your command, such as Bradley Fighting Vehicles, recon and attack helicopters, close air support aircraft and conventional and rocket launched artillery. You can either sit warm and comfy, clicking and pointing, manoeuvring your troops across the battlefield, or drill down to experience the thrills of commanding a tank platoon, an individual tank, or to act as the gunner or driver in one of your tanks.

The Driver's restricted view.

A complete simulation

Interactive Magic has accurately simulated the Inter-Vehicular Information System (IVIS) which links each vehicle with GPS navigation data via the SINCGARS secure radio net. IVIS is available to each tank commander and graphically represents the location of each friendly or enemy object and permits you to graphically issue orders to all elements under your command or in direct support of your unit.

When you act as the tank commander you can give your gunner the order to Fire at Will, and use the Commander's Independent Thermal Viewer (CITV) to scan the battlefield, find a target, identify it and designate it. That automatically slaves the gun to the target, and is the gunner's order to fire at that target ASAP, while you use the CITV to continue scanning for other targets. The enemy will often use smoke to hide his deployment, but both you and the gunner can switch to thermal sights and continue the engagement. Class action simulation from the driver all the way to the Company Commander!

But no main gun sound...

The routine sounds of tank warfare are reproduced such as tank track noise, the roar of the gas turbine engine, and the gunner yelling "SABOT" then "UP" as he loads a Sabot round and confirms that it is ready to fire. Vividly missing is the roar of the 120mm main gun firing, and so too is the gunner's words "ON THE WAY" as he fires... pity.

The major weakness in the game is graphics; flat polygons, minor fluctuations in ground flatness and quite poor explosive effects. This is a major disappointment after so much effort has been put into the battle model. Another weakness is the limitation to 12 x 12 miles of battlefield in each engagement; this does not give you sufficient room to manoeuvre and limits the tactical flair you can employ during each mission.

Tank destruction top-side.

An exciting game with many strengths, too many for a one page review, but unfortunately some weaknesses. Nonetheless, M1A2 Abrams promises hours on intense game play.

Maj. Ian Lindgren

Plus

While you are waiting for the game to be released, I recommend reading Tom Clancy's Armoured Warfare by Harper Collins RRP $24.95.This reveals in the inner secrets of an American Armoured Cavalry Unit, and describes its weapons, systems and tactics.

http://www.imagicgames.co.uk/

80%

Category	Tank Sim
Players	1-8
Publisher	Interactive Magic
Price	$89.95
Rating	G
Available	Now

For An accurate simulation of manoeuvre warfare as practiced by American Armoured Cavalry Units.

Against Poor outside-of-tank graphics, some very obviously missing sound effects and a limited battlefield area.

Need 486 DX 2/66, 16Mb RAM, Win 95 and 2 x CD ROM

Want Pentium 100, 16Mb RAM, Win 95 and 4 x CD ROM

FALLEN HAVEN

Not all Sci-fi strategy games are created equal...

The turn based combat system works, but it has its flaws.

It looks good, sounds good, installs good and heck, if it smelt, it'd probably smell good too. But that's about all Fallen Haven is, a game that has it all but lacks everything. Sounds a little too Zen? It's simply really, it lacks the most important game factor of all: playability.

At first you're wowed by the high detail isometric graphics which instantly give the game a Red Alert feel, only the guys at Interactive Magic have spent a lot more time on the graphics. Soon after you're impressed by the utterly sexy interface that slides option windows in and out depending on what object you click on. After that you find the concept of taking over enemy territories in Aliens style dropships quite appealing, and after you've battled your way through a territory or two, you begin to think the game has some promise.

And after that, you get bored.

Mmmm, strategy. Sort of.

Pretty, detailed graphics do not a good game make.

Big time boo boo

Fallen Haven is a carefully developed game of minimal proportions. The unit types are limited to a small selection which tries to cover all of infantry, armour and artillery. There are three 'race' types - Humans, Taurans (no originality points here) and some neutral rebels. But you can only play the Humans and Taurans.

Take your rather limited pick and then do your best to conquer your foe in a turn based fighting system by taking the few territories that make up the alien world of New Haven (see that's where Fallen Haven comes in, it's New Haven, falling... sort of).

And that's all there is to it. A meagre number of territories, three different map surface types (grass, desert and moon rock) and, apart from an introductory campaign, there's only one other campaign to play. It's called 'all against the human player' where every territory apart from your starting territory is automatically owned by the enemy.

Fighting is weird. Unit types, no matter what class, seem to be able to take out just about any other unit type with one shot. This makes planning for ambushes and the like virtually impossible, especially because the player whose turn it is to move also gets to shoot first, regardless of any free movement points the enemy unit might have which would normally be used for reaction fire. So, even though you hide a unit behind the corner of a wall, with enough movement points for reaction fire, an enemy unit can pop around, shoot, and (due to the one-shot kill most units are capable of) kill your unit before it gets a chance to fire back. It's all rather frustrating as the strategy boils down to timing your moves so that you move out of cover, shoot, and get behind cover before your enemy does the same to you.

Units look nice, but there isn't enough variety.

All the trappings

There are six technologies you can research that allow you to improve the fire rate, damage, movement points and so on of your units and you can build all manner of production, research and defensive structures on your territories. But for all its glitter, Fallen Haven just reeks of a quick buck. Throw in all the popular features of this genre' and sell it. Doesn't work guys, the gamers pick it up.

Oh, and its single player. Games of this genre' don't survive these days unless they are multiplayer. It's a given. I shouldn't need to say it. We all know it. Yet Fallen Haven was released into this very popular gaming genre' as a single player game. Baffling.

Ashton Mills

Plus

http://www.imagicgames.com/fhaven.dir/fhaven.html

71%

Category	Turn based strategy
Players	1
Publisher	Interactive Magic
Price	$TBA
Rating	G
Available	Now

For Very nice graphics, slick interface. Fun for a while.

Against Needs more campaigns, more units, better battle system and multiplayer ability. The shine soon wears off and there's little that keeps you wanting to play.

Need P75, 8Mb RAM, 2XCD, Win95

Want P90, 16Mb RAM, 4XCD

RED ALERT: COUNTERSTRIKE

Can Westwood do no wrong? It seems they can... Counterstrike is their first disappointment, let's hope it's a passing aberration.

Tank rush!

Mobile Tesla tanks - oh yes. Pity about multiplay.

It was of no great surprise a while back when Westwood announced that a Red Alert expansion pack was in the pipeline. An immensely popular game was going to get some extra multi-player maps, new solo missions and some additional music tracks. Red Alert fans didn't get overly excited until it became apparent that new units were to be made available in the upgrade. Tesla Tanks, Super Soldiers and even an upgraded Nuclear arsenal would be found on the new battlefront. Being that Red Alert is one of the most popular on-line multi-player games around, it was assumed that any new units would be included for some human vs human mayhem. Sadly they aren't, and numerous multi-player maps (which you can make yourself or dredge of the Net by the bucket load), don't make up for this oversight.

Finally, the Allies get air power.

Plot your missions

The new units are scattered throughout sixteen new missions. Whilst the last C&C upgrade, Covert Ops, was extremely difficult and frustrating for many, Counterstrike strikes a better balance in it's mission toughness. Of the sixteen missions, twelve involve either fully fledged base construction or unit production of some sort. A definite move away from missions involving the storming of an enemy base with a tiny limited attack force. Not surprisingly the more interesting of these missions feature the new units, and for some reason the Soviets seem to have the technological edge here. Ahh well, since they have been chasing the Allied Chronosphere constantly without success, Westwood must have felt sorry for old Stalin and his mates. The fave new unit is Volkov the Super Soldier and his sidekick, Chitzkoi the wonder bionic dog (I kid you not). Volkout is a massively beefed up version of Tanya (the Allied commando), who kills infantry with ease, buildings with ease and even tanks with ease! As a plot twist to Red Alert, Tanya and Volkov are even involved in a fateful shootout. The Tesla Tank is the other major new kid on the block, and we can only hope that it will appear in the realm of multi-player one sweet day. Basically a lightly armoured, agile Tesla Coil that looks the part screaming through an enemy base electrifying the enemy. Other surprises in store revolve around Migs and Subs, both equipped with Nuclear weapons and the Allies finally getting some air power.

Tesla tank assault.

Take that, nasty bridge.

Secret ant missions

Continuing the novelty and wacky theme of Dinosaurs in Covert Ops, we now have Giant Ants. These pests find your base installations quite tasty, and worse still some of them breath fire. Fun for a short time, but nothing of great consequence. Basically that's the problem with Counterstrike. It's fun playing with some of the new units, listening to new audio tracks and the like for a short time but the Command & Conquer genre has graduated and demands attention to multi-player. Counterstrike missed a major opportunity to further develop Red Alert as a multi-player experience. If you crave some more solo missions, or feel compelled to shoot ants, you'll get some kicks. For everybody else it looks like Command & Conquer 2 here we come.

Peter Sharpe

The new missions are well balanced.

Plus

http://www.westwood.com
While Counterstrike isn't a must have, Westwood Studios started the whole C&C phenomena and we can't wait for the next instalment.
Bug Hunt -On the Red Alert title screen hold down shift and click on the top right of the screen for Ant mode.

69%

Category	Real time strategy
Players	1
Publisher	Westwood Studios
Price	$39.95
Rating	MA15+
Available	Now
For	Solo missions can be played in any order. WIN95 Desktop theme and added musical tracks.
Against	Multi-player left high and dry. New missions only wet the appetite.
Need	The original Red Alert
Want	No extra system resources other than Red Alert required.

DOGDAY

This Australian game shows just how advanced the local development scene is. Makes you proud, eh!

Bet there's something in the desk

Very nice ray-traced graphics

It's a dog's life...

It's a dogs life, you see

Me, I've always tried to stay out of that kind of stuff. I mind my business, and generally keep my head down. Sure, I sniff the occasional crotch, and I've been known to lick my privates in a public place - but who hasn't? Mostly though, I've been a model citizen, but one day some of Chegga's heavies swooped on me and took me straight to the pound. It turned out that they wanted to charge me with being a sympathiser to the Coalition Against Totalitarian Society (CATS for short) - probably running short for their execution quota or something. Anyway, luckily all I received was a beating that very nearly killed me, and when the guards changed shift I made a desperate dash for freedom, and unbelievably, made it. Back home tending to my wounds, I vowed that I would do whatever I could to overthrow this oppressive regime where the privileged few sat up on top of the social order, fat and content, while everyone else led a life not fit for a cat!

The Dog and a box of some sort.

Don't drink from the toilet

Dark and oppressive environment

The team from Asylum, those responsible for DogDay, should be justifiably proud of the game. It's a graphical adventure shown in the first person, with extremely impressive ray traced graphics that depict a dark and oppressive environment, in keeping with the theme of the game. The interactional aspects are well handled too; a simple and functional 'point and click' style interface in combination with full screen FMV sequences in between locations works almost perfectly. Being an adventure game, there's the usual puzzles and tasks to complete as you progress - and often in the past this has been a major failing point for games in this genre, the puzzles either being too hard or too easy or just plain silly. In DogDay though, the puzzles have at least something to do with the plot (once you get into the mindset that you're a dog in an oppressive dog society), and while some are pretty easy others will tax you for ages. They're all enjoyable however, especially the arcade 'puzzles'. One of the tasks is to venture into a games arcade and play three arcade classics; Space Invaders (renamed Puss Invaders), PacMan (PacDog), and Asteroids (Droids) - a high score in each will get you an item necessary later in the game.

Overall, DogDay is a very impressive first up effort for new Australian developers Asylum, and if you're into this style of game then it's well worth a look.

Gareth Jones

82%

Category	Interactive adventure
Players	1
Publisher	Impact Interactive
Price	$69.95
Rating	G8+
Available	Now

For An interesting idea well executed, very pretty to look at and plenty of fun to play, with puzzles that are mostly relevant and functional.

Against Control method can become a little annoying at times. It's easy to lose your way, and things tend to need to happen sequentially - a trifle linear in gameplay.

Need 486DX2/66, 8Mb RAM, Win '95, 4 x CD

Want P90, 16Mb RAM, 8 x CD

Plus

www.asylumproductions.com
or www.impact.com.au.

SCARAB

Egyptian mechwarrior with strategy and resource management in a 3D polygon world - we'll have some of that!

Horus, Sekhmet and Anubis

Time to put up the shield

It's kind of a tenuous storyline, but then again no-one ever said that all games have to be based on realistic situations. The storyline for SCARAB runs something like this; The Egyptians actually had it right and their Gods are real, not just figments of an overactive imagination. In this scenario the Gods - Osiris, Ra and all the rest aren't co-existing very well. Osiris has become mad with power, and wants to get rid of all the other Gods and their followers so that him and his slaves are all that's left and they can happily go about building their monuments and sacrificing themselves. Kind of silly, but a decent enough excuse for a game, and not a bad game at that either.

Strategy + action

To go about his plan, Osiris has these Mechanical Gods to run around and do his dirty work - ie blowing up the other Mechanical Gods put in place by Ra so that he can become bigger and more powerful and blah blah blah, cue maniacal laughter... Anyway, you're put in control of one of these Mechanical Gods and your task is to take control of the cities one by one. It's an interesting setup, a little like Mechwarrior - you pilot mechs with various bits and pieces of weaponry and manoeuvre around the place, but it's not just a big fast whizz bang shoot em up, there's also elements of some fairly in depth strategy involved, with the mechs move around pretty slowly and the emphasis more on planning and placement than speed of reaction.

Generally there's two ways to win each level. To take control of a city, you can go around and blow up the enemy mechs three times each, which isn't such an easy task. Alternatively, to take control you must have sufficient power, and to gain power you call in your supply ship to drop power Towers. Once they have been dropped, the towers will grow into power producing generators and if you can keep enough towers on the map to supply 150% of the power needed by a city, then a timer begins to count down. Once the timer reaches zero, you win the level. Sounds simple? Well, it's not, because your opposition tends to run around and shoot your power towers. Not very nice that, but then again, you can blow up theirs too - and you'd be well advised to do so because the same rules apply to the other mechs, if they have enough power the timer begins to count down for them and if it gets to zero, you lose.

Tourist heaven.

The mech for the job

There is plenty of variety in the weaponry available, and three different mechs to choose from as well. Horus, the God of revenge (what a cool God to be huh? Much more fun than being the god of crops or something) is small and mobile, though he can't match it with the others in a direct conflict. Anubis is the middle mech - fairly quick, yet can still carry a decent array of weaponry, and Sekhmet is slow and ponderous but has a shitload of firepower.

At the start of each mission you can choose which order you use them, as you have three reincarnations per level. As for weaponry, it's as simple as calling in your supply ship which will drop a pack at your feet, and there's plenty to choose from including a few different varieties of mines, machine guns, teleporters, stealth modules, rockets, mortars, and shields. There is a provision for multiplay, and this is great over a LAN and where the game begins to really shine. Single player though, it's still quite a decent game if not a fantastic one, and adds an interesting element to the Mechwarrior style genre.

Gareth Jones

Gottim!

A very son-to-be ex-tower

G-force

Plus

www.ea.com/eastudios/eastudios.html

81%

Category	Action / Strategy
Players	1-6
Publisher	Electronic Arts
Price	$89.95
Rating	G8+
Available	Now

For Interesting use of the genre, adding new elements to it. Functional interface, and intuitive control methods.

Against Could have had a little more detail in the graphics, and though it is supposed to be a real time strategy game, could have moved just a tad faster.

Need P90, Win 95, 16Mb RAM, 4 x CD,

Want P120 +

AGE OF SAIL

WOODEN SHIPS & IRON MEN

Without warning, 2 new strategy games appeared on the horizon. Both set in the golden age of pirates and "Tall Ships", both offering, seemingly similar challenges. Peter Sharpe sets sail and gives both the full PowerPlay workout.

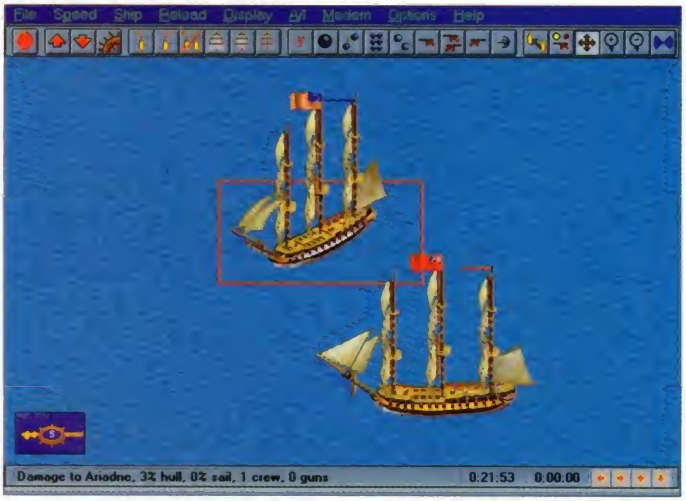
Age of Sail

Age Of Sail takes us back to a time when warfare was a grand and almost romantic affair. The wise Sea Salt Captain matching his wits not only against the enemy fleet but against the wild and savage sea. The backdrop of grand old Tall Ships, battling for Queen and Country, Scurvy and the odd bit of slavery... er um maybe it wasn't so romantic after all. Since most PC wargamers like their freedom and Vitamin C, Age Of Sail tends to present the tactical side of battling on the high seas, with a healthy dose of period pageantry.

Slow and steady battles

Being that the Tall Ships of the 18th Century were slow in making basic manoeuvres, Talonsoft have seen this as good reason to implement Age of Sail as a Real time combat game. Forget any visions of frantic Red Alert mouse clicking. It's all slow and steady with battles concentrating on trying to get your ship into an advantageous firing position. As outboard motors were deemed tools of Lucifer by Religious Leaders of the time, wind direction and strength play a vital part in your tactics. Many a time I was chasing a ship, with a sudden wind change bringing on a need for changing the sails and the arming of close up twin shot cannons. Those old enough to remember watching America's Cup Racing on TV (a sad pastime I admit) will notice familiar elements here. Trying to gain wind advantage, racing to change sails and the attempt to out turn the enemy ship. The big difference is the slower pace, and the ability to blow away the enemy with some well placed grapeshot.

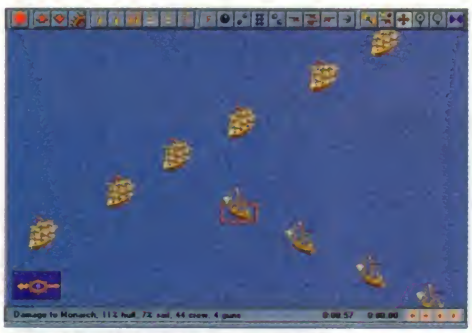
The interface is generally excellent with readouts of ship status along with crew strength all logically laid out. A good sense of control is maintained with up to 3 ships on each side. Larger fleets led to confusion through info overload. Even with the ability to issue fleet commands, large battles were often too difficult to manage.



Deep strategy combined with a real-time engine

Historical scenarios

On offer are many historical scenarios that let you assume command of ships in varying conflicts from the Napoleonic Wars to the American Revolution. After gaining your sea legs, the full campaign mode will have you sinking enemy ships in a chase for promotions with your particular navy (British, Spanish, French or American). The Campaign mode is slightly underwhelming as a feel of being in an extensive war is not carried well. There are not many reports on how the wider conflict is faring, or even if your mission had any bearing on the war as a whole. As individual missions don't have any great bearing, it becomes a "sink the ship for promotion" exercise, and after a while I felt like a lonely fortune seeking pirate.



An excellent interface makes controlling groups easy

C&C on valium?

Fortunately, as your Naval career progresses you gain control of more ships, thus giving the ego a welcome boost. If you would rather hit the wide oceans without all these structured scenarios there is a Mission Editor included, not completely user friendly but a welcome addition.

Wargames not containing hexes and bearing the popularist label "Real Time" are sometimes criticised by armchair generals. They are accused of simplifying command decisions by watering down (some puns should be, but can't be resisted) strategy so as to appeal to the action crowd. Age Of Sail has enough ship and combat variables to keep tacticians happy whilst maintaining an air of excitement during the combat. If you desire a nice crossover point from the world of C&C/Warcraft 2 to more tactical based combat and old time ships are appealing, Age of Sail fits the bill.

Plus

http://www.talonsoft.com - Homepage for Talonsoft and proof they like their Strategy in large quantities.

Patch info -Latest Patch at time of writing is 1.04. The patch adds some new features such as Repairable ships and the ability to fire from the bow and stern of the ship. Nice Patch!

It's more detailed than Age of Sail

Wooden Ships and Iron Men

Wooden Ships and Iron Men (WS&IM) continues with the Napoleonic Naval era that worked well in Age of Sail. Avalon Hill like their strategy games and show that grappling hooks and sail cloth can tax the brain as much as tanks and infantry.

Thankfully the scenarios are editable

Turn-based cannon antics

WS&IM uses the turn based strategy formulae to simulate the many facets of battle on the rough seas of old. The main battle screen gives a nicely angled view of the various ships about to engage in some cannon antics. Clicking on the Captain's Wheel traces out a movement path in front of your ship, the extent of which comes down to utilizing the wind in your favour. Trying to run into the breeze/gale will lead to stand still, whilst hoisting the sails and sailing with the wind behind you will let you move further and generally let you sail into a better position. Firing the cannons is an equally functional affair, use the sextant, line up ye old angles of cannon attack and aim for the sails or the hull of the enemy. The end of turn sequence results in all ships moving along their paths and letting rip with cannon fire. While you can't exactly order your men around in the style of Gregory Peck in those oldie Horatio Hornblower movies, crew management plays an important part of your victory plan. Out of your crew compliment men have to be allocated to all shipboard duties such as ship repairs, manning the guns, and changing the sails. As you lose men in battle, the juggling act of keeping your ship running efficiently is often the most important part of the game. Do you repair the ship, or put everyone on guns? Frankly I'd be tempted to put everyone on Sails and bugger off to the south Pacific as these battles become quite intense and a watery grave doesn't appeal but such cowardly actions do not an Admiral make.

Seamen and the Captain's log

As with Age of Sail individual scenarios (with editor) and a campaign option are both available. Without going down to the local library and scouring through the history of Naval warfare the scenarios seem to cover various naval incidents. From small skirmishes (nice practise) to large scale Naval blockades. The campaign mode is simplistic with you choosing one of the Naval powers of the time, and taking control of a ship. The Captain's log then takes you on a journey with such decisions as "you see a ship on the horizon will you investigate or run away" ...mmm well, things do get more interesting as you gain rank and influence. It would have been fun to direct your own patrol routes through the Atlantic on a strategic map but at least the ships encountered in the campaign are decided on a random basis which adds some flavour to the proceedings. Thankfully the scenarios offer enough variety for both the Navally challenged right up to aquatic megalomaniacs.

If you are still having nightmares about drowning at sea from watching the Poseidon Adventure one too many times, or Ocean combat in the times of old doesn't appeal, WS&IM will not overly stimulate the strategist in you. Fans of the period will find a game that can be rewarding not only because of its historical nature but primarily because of the varying tasks such as crew management that are undertaken in battle.

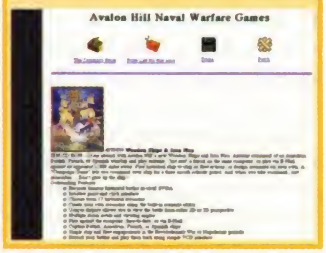
Peter Sharpe

The ships look wooden - but are the men Iron?

Plus

http://www.avalonhill.com - Finding Red Alert too easy. Come here and read about games that challenge your very sanity.

Patch Info - 1.02 is the one to grab. If you have 8Mb RAM it'll stop the greatest horror of all, system crashes.



Age of Sail

79%

Category	Strategy
Players	1-2 Modem play
Publisher	Talonsoft
Price	$TBA
Rating	G
Available	Now
For	Comfortable learning curve for us land lubbers. Real Time and Ocean tactics come together well for some exciting moments.
Against	Campaign mode lacks punch. Coordinating large fleets is too much of a chore.
Need	486DX/33, 8Mb RAM, Windows 3.11
Want	486, 16Mb RAM, WIN 95

Wooden Ships & Iron Men

71%

Category	Strategy
Players	1-2 E-mail capable
Publisher	Avalon Hill
Price	$TBA
Rating	G
Available	Now
For	From cannon fire to assignment of crew, very nicely detailed. Nice presentation and attractive graphics.
Against	Gameplay can be boring at times for those not dedicated to this period of Naval Combat. Learning curve is a bit steep at times. Misbehaves under Win95.
Need	486, 8Mb RAM
Want	486DX/66

DIE HARD TRILOGY

3-games in one, 3D accelerator support and digitised Bruce, that's 2 out of 3 - not bad!

Bruce meets Virtua Cop. Yippie ki yay

Fully exploiting the success of all the Die Hard movies, Fox interactive have released the Die Hard Trilogy as a Die Hard Trilogy game. That is to say, instead of getting one game, you're really getting three.

Hard

To elaborate, each game centers on a theme present from each movie. In the first game, labelled Die Hard, you have to ascend and liberate a building taken over by terrorists, all whilst rescuing hostages on the way. Die Hard is presented in a 3rd person style with the camera placed outside your game character. A map on the bottom left on the screen ensures that you can adhere to the strict time limit without getting painfully lost and red dots representing enemies are always easy to find and blast away. This first Die Hard game is the weakest out of all three, and really isn't that playable. There's masses of graphical bugs as well. Textures aren't incorporated into the game correctly leaving black squares around objects, which is especially noticeable on the 3Dfx.

Harder

The second game in the trilogy, labelled Die Harder is infinitely better. Here's where the fun starts. This game is presented in the 1st person style and is essentially in the same style as the Virtua Cop games by Sega. Initially armed with only a 10-shot Beretta, enemies emerge from behind posters or drop down from the roof etc. Pounding away on the left mouse button will fire at enemies, but after you exhaust your ammo, you have to reload. Although just a simple feature it adds a certain immersion factor to the overall gaming experience. Secondary and tertiary weapons are also available, grenades and rockets can be fired taking out terrorists, innocent bystanders and the game environment alike. The walls explode all over the place, monitors drop from the ceiling and general mayhem abounds everywhere. Looking back on an area after a fire fight looks amusingly like one has really happened. Points are also awarded for killing people on fire labelled a "Mercy shot". The inclusion of Bruce Willis' voice is also quite fun. Accidentally shooting a hostage will prompt an "Uh oh", and grenading a bunch of terrorists will result in a "Yippie Ki Yay" among other 'cisms.

Careful of the pedestrians...nah.

Really very hard indeed

The final game labelled Die Hard with a Vengeance has you inside a cab racing around New York looking for and disabling the bombs planted by, you guessed it, an evil terrorist. This game is either as fun, or more fun than Die Harder, with its totally frenetic pace. Starting the level, you have to drive through city streets tracing down the bombs in a very strict time limit.

The most interesting factor about this game is that the city is really a grid. Burning around the streets, you have to make sharp left right turns just like if you were driving through the CBD. Around you, and to avoid are also myriads of pedestrians. Although it's inevitable you'll hit one of them, it's sadly kind of funny to see them bounce of your hood and the windscreen wipers clean off their blood. Do gooders, don't be horrified, the blood textures look more like strawberry Jam, and all the hit and run victims get up and walk away to be mowed down another day.

Plus

Standard PC
The game runs Ok on a standard non-accelerated system. There's a lot of jerking as normally associated with this platform and the game runs slower, otherwise still quite fun.

Rendition Verite
Getting better, the use of bilinear filtering, although present, doesn't make the game any prettier. The game runs considerably faster, and although all the jerkies are gone, the game still seems a little slow.

3Dfx
As is always the case, this is the best version. All the bilinear additions of the Rendition, silky smooth frame rate and fast arcade-style speed. The best platform to play this game on - it's a buzz.

The gameplay is so stimulatingly entertaining, fast paced and strangely addictive that you not only know you're playing a classic, but it's the closest feeling you'll get to "the good old days" of computer gaming.

Jere Lawrence

80%

Category	3D Shooter, 1st person shooter, Driving
Players	1
Publisher	Fox Interactive
Price	$89.95
Rating	MA 15+
Available	Now
For	Totally addictive gameplay with lot's of shooting, 'cisms from the movie uttered by Bruce Willis and good level design. 3 games in one - total bargain.
Against	The graphics are seriously ugly. The first game, Die Hard is a boring waste of time and nowhere near as playable as the other two games.
Need	Pentium 133, 16Mb RAM, Win 95.
Want	3Dfx

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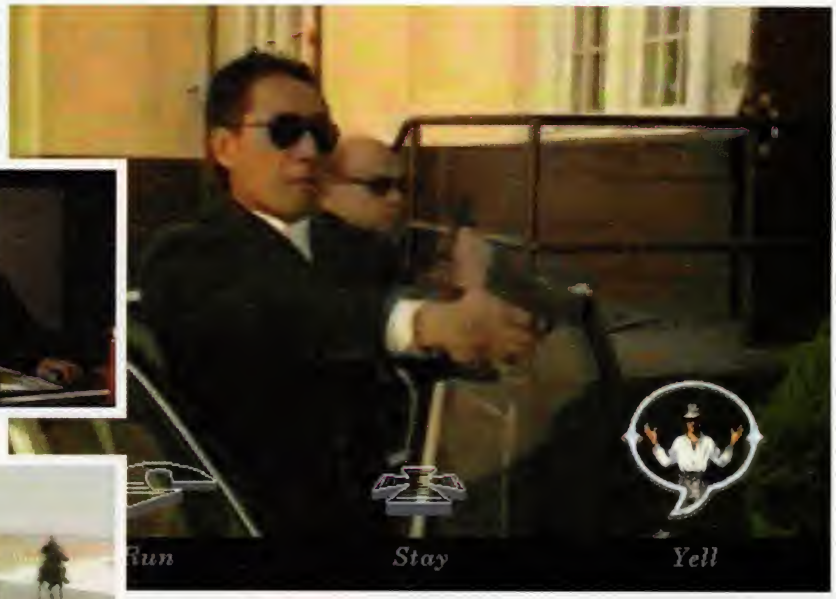
A FORK IN THE TALE

The quest for the perfect "Interactive Movie" continues...

As soon as you start a new game of A Fork In The Tale, you find yourself walking out of a building onto a deserted street. The peace is broken almost immediately when a woman rushes out of the building behind you, runs headlong into your back, quickly utters a brief apology and hurries on down the footpath. While this is happening a couple of icons appear at the bottom of the screen, but, before you realise what their function is, they have disappeared.

The video sequence continues as you watch the woman approach a group of men and begin what appears to be some sort of argument. Another couple of icons flash up on screen, and you have barely enough time to distinguish the one of an arrow pointing forward and then click upon it. You now walk towards the arguing group ahead, catching a few words of the heated conversation.

Suddenly, a car screeches around the corner and some very dubious characters leap out waving guns everywhere. Icons appear again, and you frantically select the one that means you stay where you are. The action cuts to show the woman struggling with one of the men, and more icons spring into consideration. Clicking on the flashing circle that seems to be indicating the man's torso, you step forward and thump him in the chest. He keels over and releases his grip on the woman, but before you can celebrate this noble act, another man points a gun in your face and pulls the trigger.



Bewildering pace, and a very confusing story with limited voices.

Hmm, maybe I'll run away.

Decide quickly or you're screwed.

Mystical fantasy

And so on it goes. Video sequences playing constantly, icons of various descriptions popping up whenever you have the opportunity to make some decision, the action rarely dipping below this frankly bewildering pace. You're not dead here, by the way. It seems you have become some sort of chosen one, and are whisked away to an island where you encounter, among countless black-clad guard-types and other assorted lunatics, the very same woman who only moments ago bumped into you in the street. While initially promising, the plot rapidly deteriorates into the kind of mystical fantasy tosh that can only be described as incomprehensible drivel. Yeah, it's nearly funny for a while, but soon becomes deeply tedious and very silly.

Similarly, the original gameplay draws you in to begin with. Because the action is being forced along all the time, things happen without waiting for any input from the player (in such cases it is assumed that you are merely standing there doing nothing - which is precisely what you are doing). And, thus, if you want to do something, you have to decide instantly and then select the icon in matter of seconds.

Quite entertaining at first

This non-stop, almost real time, action is quite entertaining at first. But then the twin terrors of exhaustion and frustration set in. It really is very tiring playing this game. Particularly when nothing makes sense and you start seeing scenes repeat themselves, complete with exactly the same speech and sound effects. (And, christ, that bloke who does the voices is irritating - Rob Schneider is his name, and because he's a comedian he thinks he has to be funny every time he opens his mouth, but he's not).

There's little logical consistency or coherency to what's happening, and after getting lost for the 100th time or watching the same sequence yet again, I'm willing to bet you'll be pretty bored and more than slightly pissed off with the whole thing.

David Wildgoose

58%

Category	Adventure
Players	1
Publisher	Any River
Price	$TBA
Rating	M
Available	Now
For	Initially promising and (nearly) original idea.
Against	But it's just Dragon's Lair with proper actors, really.
Need	Pentium, Win95, 8Mb RAM, 2xCD
Want	P90, 16Mb RAM, 4xCD

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PlayStation

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TEST DRIVE: OFF ROAD

Accolade revives the legendary Test Drive name for a meaty paddock-thrash.

You're burning down a dirt track in the middle of a forest at such a speed, you become airborne after hitting that suspiciously tame looking bump. You panic as you fly towards an embankment. Although completely futile, you steer to the right. You land almost straight on into the embankment at full speed, rebound off the thing and roll a couple of times towards the center of the track. Managing to come out of the roll upright, you shake off the effects, take a deep breath, and hit the accelerator. You have other four-wheelers to catch up to!

Redneck racing

It's been said that it takes a certain type of person with a certain kind of mentality to get into a rather expensive car and let things rip in the more rugged parts of our landscape. And as soon as someone says something to that effect, you get the quiet one coming up with "We can make a game out of this, you know!". And so, Test Drive Off Road is a game where you get to take out cars that you know you'll probably never get the chance to drive in the real outdoors, and race them to all buggery. In TDOR, there are four of these "luxury" cars to choose from. There's the Hummer, the Land Rover Defender 90, the Chevrolet K-1500 Z71 and the all-round favourite US 4WD, the Jeep Wrangler. Each of the vehicles in Off Road have gotten backing from their respective manufacturers, so realistic modelling and overall look of the trucks is one thing in the games favour. Even the manual at times seems to be modeled on an advert or brochure of its respective vehicle!

No gears, no weapons - just drive.

No manual gears!

Speaking of well known names, Off Road is in fact the fourth offering by Accolade under the moniker of a Test Drive game, so there is presumably also experience in Off Road's favour. These days, games based on real-life physics (like racing/driving, flying games) need to be comprehensive enough to satisfy those wanting the ultimate in realistic handling and response, those wanting a quick hoon around with minimal fuss, and everyone in between. I settled into TDOR expecting a little more than was initially offered. Looking for the keys to control the gear stick, I found to my dismay that in TDOR there is no option of control your vehicle's transmission manually! To accelerate you use the up arrow, to brake and reverse the down arrow, and the left and right arrow keys to steer. Shock horror. Oh, there's a hand brake option too, and to successfully induce a powerslide, you have to hit this key repeatedly. Not a terribly optimistic state of affairs.

Pure racing

TDOR though, is not a comprehensive racing/driving game. It is a racing game, pure and simple. If you want any more than this, look elsewhere. You race three other off-roaders, around a track, with the aim being first over the finish line. The presentation is very much arcade. The cars respond to the terrain realistically - they roll, jink, thud for example, though take no damage whatsoever. To succeed in the game, you are forced to stick to the track. If you attempt to explore the surroundings, you'll miss a check point and therefore ruin your chance of winning the race. And in TDOR, winning is everything. Winning is simply a matter of getting familiar with the track, and hoping that nothing goes wrong. Therein lies the challenge - timing. Poor timing will be rewarded with a decent helping of frustration, and of the worst kind - thanks to some pretty shoddy collision detection. Still, TDOR is a fun racer. Sadly, it isn't much more than that.

March Stepnik

It's called off road, but you have to stick to the track.

Whoops, think I over-inflated the tyres a bit.

Plus

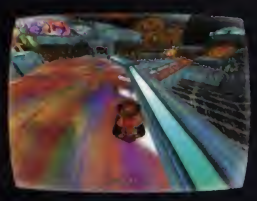
http://www.accolade.com/products/TestDrive/index.htm

70%

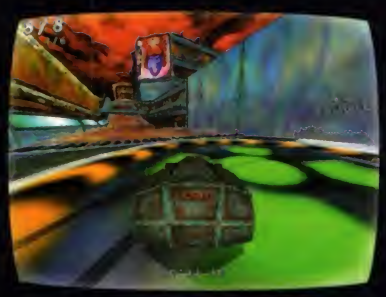
Category	Racer
Players	1-6 (network)
Publisher	Accolade
Price	$89.95
Rating	G
Available	Now
For	Secret cars, secret tracks, multiplayer. The graphics and audio are a treat.
Against	Those wanting to get off road will be let down, as will those expecting a decent challenge.
Need	P90, 16 MB RAM, 2xCD-ROM
Want	P166, 32 MB RAM, 4xCD-ROM, Hot video card.

POD

YOU WILL NEVER PLAY ALONE AGAIN!



David, Paris



Pablo, Barcelona

Michael, San Francisco

Kate, Sydney

Penny, London

POD is not only the fastest, meanest racing game ever, it's also the first game to harness the incredible gameplay and graphics potential of MMX and 3DFX. It's also the only game that allows you to play opponents simultaneously using the Internet, LAN and split screen. And if all that doesn't set your pulse racing, there's more. In the future new cars, tracks and tournaments will become available for all POD players, downloadable from the net along with ghost cars and global competitions. No wonder we reckon POD will be the first game you'll never grow tired of. Experience POD on line: http://www.ubisoft.com

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STAR TREK - THE BORG

Oh look, it's another Star Trek game. Fantastic. Woo. Hold me back...

You will be assimilated...

Star Trek - The Borg is not an adventure, nor is it a simulator, or a 3D shoot em up. It is an interactive movie. Contrary to popular belief, interactive movies are not automatically trashed by reviewers. They are however, generally approached with trepidation, maybe even a little uneasiness, for past efforts have not been very kind to this genre. Shoddy acting, predictable storyline and ridiculous subject matter make up the typical IM. At the heart of every reviewer is the hope that the IM they are about to embark on will not leave them scarred or tormented, rather, that the IM will in fact, entertain.

Star Trek - The Borg is one of a rare breed of interactive movies - it is actually enjoyable! A full blown multi-media effort, The Borg features 120 minutes of new ST footage and adventure. Directed by Jim Conway (director of numerous ST TV episodes), written by Hilary Bader (writer of numerous ST TV episodes) and featuring many familiar faces from the Star Trek cast, the title has been put together by people that know Star Trek. I can picture all the hard core Trekkies salivating already.

Pretty movies, not enough gameplay.

Ensign Crusher, upload the Mac virus now!

Time travel and stuff

As far as storyline goes, you play the part of Cadet Furlong, junior member of Starfleet. Notified that the ship you are serving on is about to run a suicide mission against the Borg, you are told to get your things and beam off the ship. Q, an omnipotent being prone to meddle in the affairs of Starfleet gives you the option of going ten years back in time to serve aboard the USS Righteous, a ship that was destroyed by the Borg, to set things in the future right. He also serves as your guide/helper throughout this adventure. And, John de Lancie, reprising his role as Q, is one of the main reasons why The Borg is so enjoyable. His acting and dialogue is excellent, as is the acting in general. The production overall, is top class.

Though, at the heart of this IM are the interactive bits, called decision points. Every couple of minutes or so you'll have to choose which course of action to take by clicking on the most relevant part of the screen. The only flaw would be that story development is fairly linear. Make the wrong choice, and Q will give you a hint of what the correct course of action is, and restart you at the last decision point you buggered up at.

The Borg has pace, style, and is interesting to say the least. The only question to ask is whether or not The Borg is something only a Trekkie could love. If you didn't like Star Trek, then you'd probably wouldn't like this. Thankfully though, you don't need to be a full Trekkie to enjoy it either.

The Picard Dossier

Also on this 3 CD set is a database called The Picard Dossier. Containing a huge wad of information regarding the Borg, this thing is only useful if you liked them in the first place (and according to opinion polls, the Borg are Star Trek's most favourite nemesis). Presented on screen in the form of a tricorder (much like the one Q gives you in The Borg), you can access fairly detailed information on everything to do with the Borg, taken from any official Star Trek source that featured these lovable foes. Video clips spice up the odd entry too. To be quite honest though, the overall presentation is rather stale, with plenty of detailed and cross-referenced white on black text. Only something that a true trekkie could love, or for that matter, find use for.

March Stepnik

Plus

http://www.simonsays.com/startrek/borg/about.html

71%

Category	Interactive Movie
Players	1
Publisher	Dataflow
Price	$79.95
Rating	M
Available	Now
For	An enjoyable IM experience, that is well thought out and well produced.
Against	Still a little linear, and unless you are very lucky, you'll end up going in circles a bit.
Need	Win 95, 8Mb RAM, Pentium
Want	P100+, 16 Mb RAM, 2Mb video

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Asylum

ATF Gold

CATEGORY Combat Flight Sim

PLAYERS 1-8 LAN, 4 on Net

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts

PRICE $79.95

RATING G

AVAILABLE Now

NEED Pentium 100, 16Mb Ram

WANT Pentium 166+

overall

86%

A solid combination that now meets its multiplayer requirements.

Electronic Arts and Janes' Combat Simulations do indeed "build sims by the book" as their packaging claims; they also know how to market a product and get the most from it. It's an economics lesson to all of us really! ATF Gold combines the original Advanced Tactical Fighters game, the NATO Fighters expansion CD and throws in some additional features which really makes great value for money now that EA have developed the game to its fullest extent.

By combining the game and its add on disc, you now have the option to fly the Egypt 1998 and Russia 2002 campaigns from the original ATF game, and the Baltics 2009 campaign from the NATO Fighters expansion CD. This gives a total of 120 missions in wide ranging terrain, and the Pro Mission Creator toolbar and select World features give you control over what type of mission you want to fly, where and when, within the conditions you dictate; all through an easy drag and drop interface ultimately permitting an infinite number of missions.

Good looks, rather than dynamic realism is the ATF thing.

Whoops, hope I don't have to land there.

ATF Gold maintains the same popular, familiar, and easy to use interface but no longer runs in DOS; instead it gives us the benefits of DirectX technology by natively operating in Windows 95. The new features in ATF Gold are Internet Play, Best Textures Graphics (somewhat CPU hungry) and additional aircraft bringing the total you can fly up to 60! If you've got a machine with grunt, and delight in the "not too technical" variety of flight simming - go get this game!

Maj. Ian Lindgren

Zombie Wars

CATEGORY Platform

PLAYERS 1

PUBLISHER Sprint

PRICE $29.95

RATING M

AVAILABLE Now

NEED 486/66, 8Mb RAM, Win3.1/Win95

WANT Nothing special

overall

69%

A primary-coloured platform game. You decide.

Just your bog-standard platfrom game.

Attention all 486 owners! This game will work properly on your computer! Without turning the graphical detail down to "Abstract Stick Figures" level! No, really, it WILL! Simply overlook the fact that Zombie Wars is a pretty standard, unadventurous platform game for a minute and instead rejoice in the possibility that you could soon be playing a game that wasn't made more than two years ago.

In this sequel to "the award winning" Halloween Harry, the man with the alliterative name returns to put paid to the inevitable alien invasion. Aided by his PVC-clad sidekick, Agent Diane, Harry must venture through several levels of zombie-bashing and platform hopping to - wait for it! - "save humanity". Oh yes!

I enjoyed Zombie Wars for the afternoon I played it. It lets you do all the usual platform things; walk right or left through parks, caves, and buildings, blasting baddies with photon guns, grenades and missiles, collecting hamburgers and ice cream that miraculously restore your health, and saving the game at various computer terminals along the way. In fact, the save system is excellent. The game records when you reach a certain mission and will let you restart from any of these with a simple click on the File menu. Bonus marks for that.

The only thing that annoyed me was the lack of the trusty jump function. In place of which is a jet pack that lets you fly for short periods, but is quite a nuisance to use effectively. It doesn't add anything to the game, it just makes it unnecessarily complicated.

So, yes, I did enjoy Zombie Wars for a while. Though having said that, I can't imagine wanting to play it again. Perhaps someone about ten years younger than me (i.e. around 12), with a higher boredom threshold would like it more. Except, of course, that it has an (unwarranted in my opinion) M rating.

David Wildgoose

The jetpack is pretty cool, but hard to control.

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"The Course Designer is a landmark!"
-T. Liam McDonald
PC Gamer

"...gives Links LS a run for its money."
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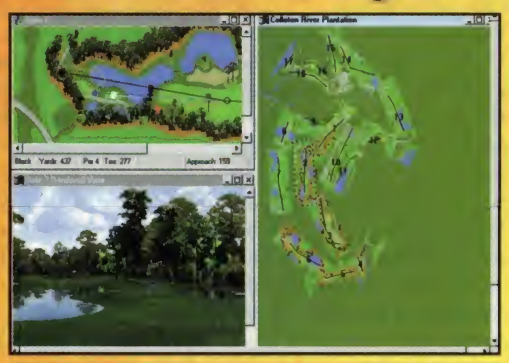
Computer and Net Player

"...promises to be among the greatest achievements yet on the electronic links."
PC Games

"...impressive..."
GOLFWEEK

The Course Designer



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Screenshots from pre-Alpha version of the game. Actual screen shots may vary.

AH-64D Longbow Gold

CATEGORY Combat Flight Sim

PLAYERS 1

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts

PRICE $79.95

RATING G

AVAILABLE Now

NEED Pentium 100, 16 Mb RAM

WANT Pentium 166 +, 32 Mb RAM, 6 x CD ROM

overall

92%

There won't be another realistic helicopter flight sim better than this for some time, so if you haven't purchased it yet, now is the time.

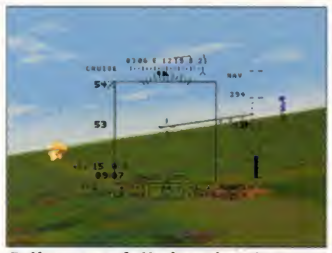
Hot on the heals of the release of Flash Point Korea, EA and Janes have released another "Gold" series product, Longbow Gold. Longbow Gold contains the original AH-64D Longbow game and the Flash Point Korea expansion disk totalling 3 CDs.

The game is able to run natively in Windows 95 and DOS and offers 400 missions in Korea and the Ukraine as well as an unlimited number of randomly generated single missions. Flash Point Korea added many new features to the original game, and thankfully the cross referencing that was required between the original manual and its Flash Point Korea addendum have been overcome with the inclusion of a new manual and keyboard reference card.

Formation flying, as hard as it gets.

New to the game are more of the elegant tutorials that lead you interactively through the weapons systems and sensors, tactics and advanced avionics. This simulation is so close to the real thing that you must use this facility to get the best from the game. Other than improved graphics, the most impressive addition to the game is the Cheat Menu which works in both campaigns. It brings up a flow chart that allows you to pick any mission in the campaign. As the name implies, it is a cheat and when using it you do not receive any points or awards. Thankfully its use does not effect your status in the campaign - but hey! When the going gets tough it sure is nice to peek ahead and see what lies in store, or alternatively, its also nice to go back and play a previous favourite mission without the constrictions imposed by the Flight Recorder.

Maj. Ian Lindgren



Full-screen, full situational awareness.

It's got the best flight model of any helicopter sim - but STILL NO TREES!

Sonic & Knuckles Collection

CATEGORY Platform

PLAYERS 1-2

PUBLISHER Sega PC

PRICE $79.95

RATING G

AVAILABLE Now

NEED Win 95, P75, 8Mb RAM.

WANT P120, 32 Mb RAM, good video card.

overall

76%

It's Sonic on your PC, nothing more, nothing less.

Watch Sonic defy the laws of gravity!

This game should be subtitled Sonic & Knuckles: A Few Good Chuckles, for a couple of reasons. You see, this collection is made up of Sonic 3 and its sequel, Sonic & Knuckles - games that surfaced on the Mega Drive a couple of years ago now. Yes, you're right - the Mega Drive was a 16-bit machine and has been dead and buried for quite a while. Hasta la vista, baby! On the PC however, Sonic & Knuckles requires a hefty Pentium with some decent RAM and a video card with grunt to ensure smooth running. Amusing, eh?

What has this version got that the 16 bit doesn't then? Nothing really. Well, nothing that makes any big difference. What you have here is over 120 levels of Sonic platforming "fun" on your PC. And these levels have all been seen before too.

Just in case you didn't know, Sonic was a hugely successful and popular "icon" on Sega's Mega Drive systems, and star of a handful of popular platform titles. While some may view Sonic on the PC as an act of travesty akin to advertising in space, subliminal messaging, or turning Graceland into something useful, Sonic and Knuckles is actually the second Sonic game to grace the PC's presence. The first must have struck a chord with the gaming community, and Sega adressed the problems that people had with the first in the sequel. Firstly, no longer do you have to have Win 95 in 256 colour mode to play it (a major turn off factor of the first). Secondly, they've optimized the game so that it no longer seems to chug along at a bog awful speed on a high end Pentium. You can also play the thing at a decent speed straight off the CD. On the otherhand, you still have only two window choices - a tiny but hi-res one (looks pretty, squinting helps) or the full screen mode (easier to play, but looks fairly ugly).

Sonic and Knuckles pulls no punches. It's a fairly large collection of decent platforming levels. It's Sonic on your PC. It is also nothing new, nor anything original. If you like Sonic, you'll like this. A safe buy if you like this sort of thing.

March Stepnik

Watch Knuckles eat magic mushrooms!... maybe not.

LATEST GAME SPECIALS

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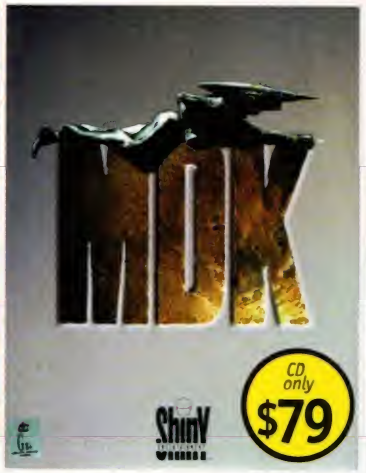
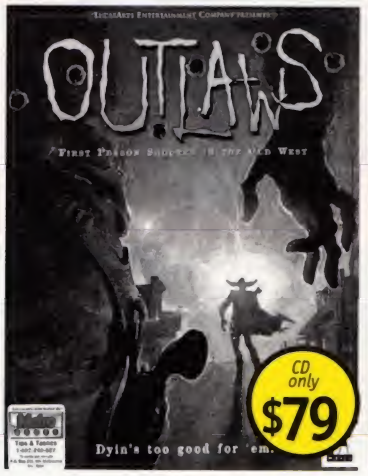
Dos/Win 95



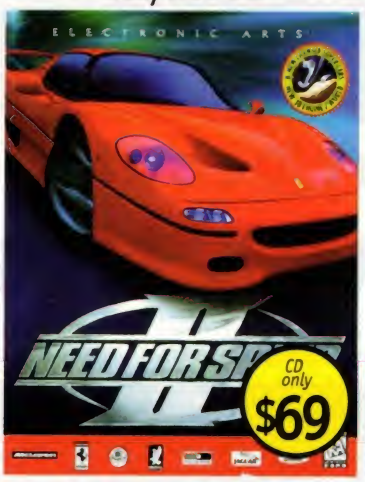
MDK (Murder Death Kill)
Dos/Win 95



Outlaws
Win 95 (Pentium 60+)

Shivers 2
Win 3.1/Win 95

Theme Hospital
Dos/Win 95



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Win 95 (Pentium 90+)

X-Wing vs Tie Fighter
Win 95

Redneck Rampage
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The Great Debate

CONSOLES versus PCs

GARETH JONES

Sick and tired of little pre-teen grommets whining and moaning about how great their console system of choice is? Sick of the debate about whether consoles will take over the PC games market, and how the PC is dead as a games machine? Well, so are we, and we're going to put a stop to it right here and now. So then let it begin, the mother of all battles; PC's v console systems.

Well...ok, we're not really staging a war, but it is a contentious issue, and one important to dedicated gamers, so we're taking a look at all the different console systems out there, and doing a bit of a comparison with the PC so that you can at least enter into the debate with a sound knowledge base behind you. Then, if you so choose, you can always still beat the shit out of the little grommet after you've crushed his argument and walk away knowing that you've both out-intellectualised a little kid in an argument and beaten him (or her) up in a senseless display of bullying bravado. Well done!

Now, opinions are like openings at the lower end of the alimentary canal (arseholes for those colloquial type people) - everyone's got one. And everyone that plays computer games, of any type, will most probably have an opinion on which system is better for games. As the staff of PowerPlay we have an opinion on the matter too, and a fairly predictable one at that, seeing as we're a PC games magazine. PC's rock, we say - though there are those that have the audacity to point out that console machines have their strengths as well. Something that you might not know is that Hyper, a console and PC games mag, is one of our sister magazines and are right across the office from us. Needless to say, during the course of the day (and especially during those infamous long pub lunches) the topic of which is the best games platform often arises in what might be called a 'frank and open exchange of opinions'. After the dust has settled, the blood been mopped up and the tantrums finished with though, usually none of us have managed to convince any of the others of anything at all - except maybe that a knee to the groin is indeed a very painful experience or that insulting Hyper editor Dan Toose's hairstyle is a fine and funny thing to do, no matter how often it happens.

So, being the fair minded and responsible adults that we are here at PowerPlay (no, really, we are. Honest) we've decided to take a closer look at all the different games systems available. We're not even going to bother to try and decide which one is 'best' though, because that's always going to be a subjective decision depending upon a heap of criteria such as the age of the gamer, the price of the system, the types of games available for a machine, what use the machine is for and so on. What we are going to do is take a close look at all the different systems available today and give you the lowdown on the tech specs and capabilities of each, the most popular games, the peripherals, the costs involved, and a few other bits and pieces too. There's 5 systems up on the slab for inspection; the Sony PlayStation (or PSX), the Sega Saturn, the Nintendo 64, and the as yet unreleased Matsushita M2 3Do system, as well as the good old PC.

SEGA SATURN

RRP $299

Buying a Saturn system would give you membership in a group comprised of four million others. Yeah, 4 million Saturn systems sold worldwide. That might sound impressive until you read on a little more and check out how many units the competition has sold. Anyway, 4 million is still a pretty huge number whichever way you look at it, and the question has to be asked - can 4 million people be wrong? Well...yes and no. The Saturn, at the time of its release, was one of the most advanced console systems ever, and when done right the games are still graphically impressive by todays standards. Sega has a long history with computer and arcade games, and ever since the Master System have been among the forefront of home computer game developers. Without Sega, it's safe to say, the face of the gaming world today would be very different. Perhaps the biggest mistake, or oversight on Sega's part during the development of the Saturn system was the lack of 3D support for the console. During the developmental phase, from around late 1992, it was decided that flat 2 dimensions were the way of the future, all that was really necessary and important, and that wasn't likely to change in the near future. Once the Sega people discovered what the Sony people were up to with their forthcoming (at the time) PlayStation they made a rapid reassessment of the situation however. The PlayStation's forte was to be 3D, and to focus on that area for their games. So late in the developmental phase of the Saturn, two CPU's were hastily added to the design so as to be able to implement 3D performance as well as (or hopefully better) than the PlayStation. Unfortunately, Sega's quick fix doesn't work quite as well as they hoped, because the dual graphics processors need to access the same memory cache - and it's nigh impossible for a programmer to get the processors running in true parallel, especially using a programming language like C. Along with this, Sega have implemented almost no operating system with the Saturn, which means the programmers need to use almost 100% hardware when programming and designing games - again not an easy task at all. There are some great games for the Saturn that fully showcase the potential of the system, like 'Nights' or 'Virtua Fighter', and because Sega are strong in the arcade market there are plenty of arcade conversions available with the opportunity for more to come in the future. Sega are the only console manufacturers to implement a peripheral that theoretically allows for Internet connection (at present) though, and as this allows for multiplay over the Internet the possibilities are huge. However NetLink has not yet been released in Australia, and while it is available in the US and Japan, there are no games that support Internet play yet.

(above) Saturn FIFA
(right) the Saturn motherboard

FAVOURITE GAMES OF THE OFFICE MEMBERS (IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER):

Ben Mansill (PowerPlay editor)
Virtua Fighter 2
Sega Rally
Panzer Dragoon

Malcolm Campbell (PowerPlay Art Director)
Virtual On
Virtua Fighter 2
Nights

Dan Toose (Hyper editor)
Virtua Fighter 2
Virtual On
Bomberman

George Soropos (Hyper deputy editor)
Virtual On
Sega Rally
Die Hard Arcade

Mark Gowing (art director MAX magazine - ex Hyper art director)
Sega Rally
Virtual On
Virtua Fighter 2

Andrew Humphries (Rolling Stone deputy editor - ex Hyper deputy editor)
Virtua Fighter 2
Sega Rally
World Wide Soccer 97

Tech specs:

CPU's:	•2 x 32-bit RISC SH2's @ 28Mhz •1 x 32-bit RISC SH1	
RAM	*Main RAM:* *Video:* *Sound:* *CD-Buffer*	2 MB 1.54 MB 540 k 512 k
CD-Rom	•Single or two speed. Max transfer 300kb/sec	
Graphical Features	•Texture mapping •24 bit capable •200,000 texture mapped polygons per second (in optimal conditions) •500,000 flat mapped polygons per second (in optimal conditions) •2 x 256k frame buffers for 3d effects.	
Resolution	•24 bit graphics, 16.7 million colours •max res: 704 x 480 (NTSC)	
Sound	•8 channel FM Synthesis •32 voices •44.1 KHz	
Peripherals	•Analog Joystick •Steering wheel •analog/digital switchable controller •memory backup cartridge •mouse •keyboard •NetLink modem and cable •Multitap •light gun	
Multiplay	• Multitap allows for multiple players on one screen. Up to six players, if games support it. • NetLink is a 28.8k modem, hence Internet connection is possible. Thus far, there are no games that allow for internet play, but the possibility is there. Not released in Australia as yet.	

SONY PLAYSTATION

RRP $299

Worldwide, Sony have the market right now, with an estimated 6 million PlayStation's floating around out there, and around 370 games to choose from. Launched in early 1995, the PlayStation has become hugely popular - a combination of a huge advertising budget and Sony's visionary Ken Kutaragi. At the time of release, there was a glut of new consoles either in late stages of development or that had just come upon the market. The now dead 3DO and Atari Jaguar, as well as the Sega Saturn had concentrated on 2 dimensional output - flat shaded polygons - and were trumpeting the output in this arena of their respective systems. Sony, who had never been a player in the hardware arena were the only ones to project into the future and see a vision - the delightful vision of games in three dimensions. Still now, all the games produced for the PlayStation have to be approved by Sony, and they usually only accept games that showcase the 3D capabilities of the system - which indicates how important it is to Sony that the games look as good as they can, given the strengths of the system.

FAVOURITE GAMES OF THE OFFICE MEMBERS:

Ben Mansill
"Haven't seen anything I've liked yet."

Malcolm Campbell
Wipeout 2097
Tomb Raider
Street Fighter Alpha 2

Dan Toose
Wipeout 2097
Tekken 2
FIFA 97

George Soropos
Wipeout 2097
Tomb Raider
Porsche Challenge

Mark Gowing
Wipeout 2097
Jumping Flash 2
Tobal #1

Andrew Humphries
Wipeout 2097
Twisted metal 2
Total NBA '97

On the other hand, Sony have gone out of their way to make it easy for programmers to create games for the PlayStation, as they've released extensive libraries for developers to use rather than start from scratch. On top of this, Sony have recently released a peripheral device in the US, Europe and Japan (and very soon in Australia) called Net Yaroze. It's an interesting direction for Sony to take, as Net Yaroze is a games development kit for the PlayStation. The development kit contains a serial cable to connect to any low spec PC (where the coding for the game takes place), development libraries and a black Playstation specially configured to play Yaroze games as well as any others from across the world. One of the best features about this has to be that once completed, the Yaroze-created games can be uploaded to a web site and available for others to play...provided of course that they've have shelled out approximately US$1200 for the Yaroze development kit. Then on top of that, Sony have the rights for first refusal of every Yaroze created game, so if a backyard developer comes up with a great idea for a game, and then goes ahead and actually makes a great game, Sony will be waiting for them to sign on the dotted line. So, for those that have a couple of grand burning a hole in their pocket, know how to program in C, and have an idea for a great (3D) game, the Net Yaroze kit would be great. I'm going to guess that isn't a lot of people however. That aside though, the PlayStation is a very decent machine - it has plenty of capability, especially for 3D games, there is a huge and disparate array of games (though not that many great ones), and plenty of peripherals to choose from. The future doesn't look all that bright though, the PlayStation is now over two years old, and that's a long time in the computer world - two years ago a 486/66 was a beast in the PC world - and the PlayStation is beginning to show its age. The technology used in the design was a step ahead when first released, but it's still only a 32-bit machine, and now that there are newer consoles (and PC's) that excel with 3D as well as including the luxury of faster and better technology it seems likely that the Playstations time at the crest of console gaming is on the decline.

(above) Playstation FIFA (right) the Playstation motherboard

Tech specs:

CPU	•32-bit RISC 33Mhz •30 MIPS operating performance
RAM/ROM	•Main - 2MB •Video - 1MB •Sound - 512k •CD Buffer - 32k •OS ROM - 512k
CD-ROM	•Transfer speeds 150ms single 300ms double
Graphical features	•Gouraud shaping •Texture mapping •Flat shading •360,000 polygons per second (in optimal conditions) •Dedicated GPU •Sprite display from 1x1 to 256x256 pixels •Data decompression engine with direct connection to CPU bus @ 80 MIPS
Resolution	•max: 640 x 480 (interlaced and non interlaced) •24 bit colour, 16.7 million colours
Sound	•24 channels •44.1 KHz sampling rate •MIDI support •PCM audio source
Peripherals	•Net Yaroze •Analog joystick •Memory card (128k) •Link cable - allows for linking between two systems, just like networking PC's together. •Mouse •Multitap unit - four players on each unit, two multitaps can be linked together for 8 players. •Light gun

NINTENDO 64

RRP $399

Nintendo isn't a new company, it's been around for over 100 years, and began as a manufacturer of traditional Japanese playing cards in 1889. Since then, it has gone on to become one of the seminal influences in the computer gaming arena. Nintendo first came into the games market when they launched Pong - an experience for gamers equivalent to the moment when the first person landed on the moon for scientists - a time to be forever cherished and celebrated. Along with computer games, Nintendo have come a long way since then, and their latest addition to the gaming hardware market is the Nintendo 64 - the newest and sexiest console on the streets at the moment. The technology inside the Nintendo 64 was designed largely by SGI, developers of the most powerful graphics engines anywhere - and it shows. In fact, the design team were so proud of their chip that they've put their names on every one (you'll need an electron microscope to take a look though). Built into the machine is hardware support for texture mapping, detail texturing, tri-linear mipmap interpolation, perspective correction, depth buffering, shading, Z-buffering, skewing, scaling, rotation, anti-aliasing, gouraud shading and alpha channelling - much much more than the PlayStation or Saturn. It's not all fantastic whizz bang stuff though - for some reason Nintendo have decided to stick with a cartridge rather than the more cost effective and capable CD-ROM, and for this reason as well as a few others, third party game developers aren't looking at an easy task to create a game for the Nintendo 64. There's also the question of whether outside developers will be able to make full use of the 64's capabilities with only around 8Mb of memory to play with, and then there's Nintendo's stipulation for complete control over approval and production for outside developers. They have also been quoted as saying that they don't care whether there are any outside developers for the 64 or not - the less competition for them the better, is their way of thinking. The reason this could be important is because it could well be that the games playing consumer suffers as a result. Sure, Mario 64 looks fantastic, and is quite a bit of fun to play but there has to be a decent choice of games for any system, otherwise the most mind blowing specs in the world will have only limited appeal to the public. At the moment, there's less than ten games available for the system, and while they all look fantastic, the only thing that's going to enable the Nintendo 64 to knock over the PlayStation as the leading games console is through both quality *and* quantity of the games available. Whether it does or not, the Nintendo 64 is comparable to a fairly high spec games PC and out performs it in a few areas. However, as with all consoles, the upgrade options are few and far between. While there are a few different controllers available or in the making, and the pad that comes with the machine is well designed and functional, there are no plans for any internet connectivity as yet, and no multi-system multiplay. We may seem to harp on a bit about multiplay, but without doubt it is the future for games, and with more and more PC games companies setting up free servers for multiplay, it seems likely that the consoles will struggle to keep up with the popularity of this new genre of gaming. At the moment, the only way to multiplay with a Nintendo 64 is through dividing the television screen into two, three or four squares, so while four player Mario Karts can be fun, you're reduced to looking at an image one quarter of the usual screen size. Along with this is the marketing niche strategy that Nintendo are using - with their previous systems such as the SNES, they were largely content with the early and pre-teen market and this is a continuing part of Nintendo's push for sales, to a degree leaving the more adult games players alone to choose from another console or to go for a PC. So, if you fit the demographic, and don't mind a fairly limited choice of games then the Nintendo 64 will be apretty awesome games machine. If you're excited at the prospect of a (relatively) cheap 64-bit games system developed by SGI, capable of amazing graphics and with the potential to produce excellent games that will appeal to a broad range of players, then you might just be a tad disappointed. We were.

(above) Nintendo FIFA (right) The N64 and extra controllers

FAVOURITE GAMES OF THE OFFICE MEMBERS (THERE'S NOT MANY, SO JUST ONE EACH THIS TIME):

Ben Mansill
Mario Kart

Malcolm Campbell
Mario Kart

Dan Toose
Super Mario 64

George Soporos
Mario Kart

Mark Gowing
Mario 64

Andrew Humphries
Mario Kart

Tech specs:

CPU	•64-Bit MIPS RISC CPU @93.75 MHz (125 MIPS) •64-Bit MIPS RISC graphics co-processor @62.5 MHz
RAM	•4MB Ram (with expansion port for later upgrades) •Rambus DRAM subsystem capable of 562.5mb/sec transfers •8-Bit Rambus bus @ max 500Mhz
Graphical Features	•160,000 capable polygons per second (maximum) •Texture mapping •Detail texturing •Tri-linear mip map interpolation •Perspective correction •Depth buffering •Shading •Rasterizing •Z-buffering •Skewing •Scaling •Rotation •Anti-aliasing •Gouraud shading •Alpha channelling (max 256 channels) •Level of detail management (LOD)
Resolution	•640 x 480 max with 21-bit colour output
Sound	•16-Bit stereo (max) @ 44.1 KHz •ADPCM compression algorithm •100 PCM channels (max)
Peripherals	•Digital/analog control pad •'64DD' magnetic media drive - a 64MB drive with 20MB writable for saved games, level add-ons and editors, and possibly internet gaming. •Memory cartridge

M2-3DO

RRP - ?

While the Nintendo 64 for a long time was 'the next big thing', now it's *the* big thing (for the console market). A look at the systems to rival the PC wouldn't be complete without the newest 'next big thing' - the M2 system. There has been a 3DO designed system on the market previously, roughly two and a half years ago, but even though it was the first 32-bit system and full of impressive specs (for the time) it never really captured the attention of the gamers largely because of the lack of quality games - and died a quiet death shortly after release. Since then, Matsushita have acquired the 3DO technology from 3DO (for around US$100 million) and are expected to announce the release of the system...sometime soon. They've been saying that for a while though, and there's a sense that the public are getting a little frustrated with waiting. From what we've seen and heard though, it might even be worth the wait - maybe. The specs released thus far are to say the least very impressive, with two Power PC 602 chips, 8MB of SDRAM, a 4 x CD-ROM (or possibly a DVD drive) and an estimation (from 3DO - so take it with a grain of salt) of the ability to draw around a million polygons per second. The information about the M2 system is scarce though, and the respective companies are remaining tight lipped at present about details of the machine, peripherals and add ons, and even the games for the system, apart from the usual press release hyperbole. This said, if it does come out looking anything near as good as the specs suggest, then we might be looking at a very powerful and capable system - though that didn't stop the first 3DO system going down the gurgler.

THE PC

One of the major strengths of PC's is their versatility...and it's also one of the biggest headaches in doing a comparison like this. With a console system there's just the console system, whereas nowadays PC's are always a composite of specialised hardware; video cards, sound cards, chipsets, monitors, RAM modules and so on. What, then, is an average PC? What's the PC's equivalent to the holy grail for gamers? So, we've put together two PC's - one that could vaguely be called the 'average' PC, and one high end beast of a gaming machine. An 'average' PC, we reckon, would look something like this; a P133, 32MB EDo Ram, 2Mb PCI video card, 6x CD-ROM, Sound Blaster 16 (or the like), around 2 gigs of hard drive space, a 15 inch monitor and a 28.8k modem. The top end machine might have something like this; P200MMX (TX motherboard), 64MB SDRAM, 4Mb Video card (ET6000, Matrox, etc), 16x CD-ROM, Awe 64 Gold or Gus PnP or the like, 4-5 gig hard drive space, 21 inch monitor, and a 33.6k modem.

Now, one of the biggest arguments you'll hear from console gamers is that PC's cost shitloads of money...and they're right. The most often used counter argument is that though you can also do shitloads more with PC's - typing for instance. Word processing, spreadsheets, easy save games, editing save game files, the internet, and so on. From a gaming point of view though, we want to know how PC's compare for games. Sure, a word processor is a useful thing to have, but using them usually involves work, or uni assignments or school. Games are much better. Much much better. So are PC's worth it? It's not just the machines, or just how good the games look, but what types of games are available as well that's important to take into consideration. To begin with, because PC's are made up of parts, upgrading is usually simple (if not always cheap). A standout example are 3D accelerator cards - Ben Mansill, the PC PowerPlay Big Kahuna, won't play action style games that aren't optimised for 3D cards, or have a patch available. The 3D revolution is a big step for games, and for an equivalent step to be taken in the console market would necessitate a new machine. True enough, Sega did try adding a 32-bit extension to their 16 bit

(top) PC FIFA (below) The motherboard

FAVOURITE GAMES OF THE OFFICE MEMBERS:

Ben Mansill
Harpoon
Master of Orion 2
Quake

Malcolm Campbell
Quake
Diablo
X-Wing/Tie Fighter

Dan Toose
Quake
Diablo
Ultima series

George Soporos
Master of Orion 2
Command & Conquer
Crusader: No Remorse

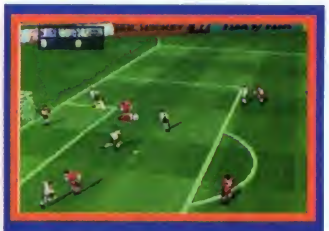
Mark Gowing
Quake
Doom 2
Interstate 76

Andrew Humphries
Quake
Diablo
Warcraft II

Mega Drive system, but it was a bit like trying to get Windows 3.x to run games with win32s - A silly idea. Consoles aren't built for upgrades, really, and though there are advantages to having a system that's the same all around the world (pretty much); developers don't have to worry about minimum specs, detail level options, and the like as they have to with PC games. Again, there are equivalent upgrading hassles in the PC world - the jump from 486 processors to Pentiums was a stumbling block for many gamers as it not only involved a new chipset, but a new motherboard, and new video card and was pretty much the same thing as purchasing a new machine and junking the old one. With both consoles and PC's the depreciation factor is high, and with PC's unless you keep a top end machine and sell it roughly every six months, you're going to end up with old parts that nobody wants, or are reduced to selling them for 10% of the purchase price. For most PC upgrades though, adding more RAM or getting a faster processor or new video card or 3D accelerator card or whatever, the process is simple and almost painless (apart from the money factor that is).

Then there's the games part. Dave Perry, in a recent interview with us (PCPP #12), said "I cannot see a limit to what the PC can do and there will never come a time when you will say 'no more, that's the limit'", and he also said that his company would probably be making games for PC's exclusively and then farming out to other companies for console ports. Now, it's a fairly hefty generalisation, but there are games that look great on different systems, that look and play terribly on others. There are a number of reasons for this though, with ports to other systems often being assigned to other companies or secondary programmers, and with different systems being strong in different areas, there aren't many games that will look good and play well across the board. In combination with this is the styles of the games themselves - almost any action oriented game will work on any system, but for the more strategic style games with any amount of depth often (almost always) the PC is the platform of choice, and rightly so. Then there's multiplayer games. Most of the consoles have a multitap unit, or the ability to have four or more controllers plugged in, but as yet none of them have any form of remote multiplayer - no modem games, no internet games, and except for the Saturn there's no multi system multiplay.

Then there's the availability of games for a particular system. PC's are the only systems that really allow for a 'try before you buy' scenario - most commonly through downloading demos online, or if not buying shareware demo disks at a store (or buying a quality magazine with a coverdisk like PowerPlay..). Not only is this easy and convenient for the gamer, but it makes things easier for smaller development companies as well. Not that every game created by someone in their bedroom will be worth playing, but the more opportunity there is for developers the greater the chances of quality games developing. And the more quality games available the stronger the system is. While there are around 370 titles available for the PlayStation, that number has to be dwarfed by those available for the PC.



Tech specs:

	Standard	Want
CPU	•Intel Pentium 133Mhz	Intel Pentium 200MHz w/MMX
RAM	32Mb EDo	64Mb Synchronised DRAM (SDRAM is approx 15% faster than EDo Ram)
Cd-Rom	•transfer rates approx 1200kb/s Average seek time approx. 230ms	Approx 2400kb/s transfers
Graphical Features	(approx) Max res: 1600x1200@75Mhz 24 Bit colour	(approx) Perspective correct texture LOD Mip Mapping Bi-linear filtering Advanced texture filtering Texture compositing Morphing Animated texturing Anti-aliasing Gouraud modulation Sub-pixel correction Alpha blending Z-Buffering
Sound	FM synthesis 16 voices 44.1KHz	FM synthesis Wavetable synthesis 64 voices 44.1KHz
Peripherals	You name it, it's probably available	

SO while there are games for the different console systems that look and play better than they would (or do) on the PC, when all things are taken into consideration it's hard not to come to the decision that a PC has to be the games system of choice for the serious gamer. This isn't to say that consoles don't have their uses - the easiest way to describe it is that consoles are great for a quick fix - for a few minutes to a half hour of button pounding and expletives consoles are in their element. For more in-depth long term gaming, for more strategy and thinking as well as a few minutes of furious action, the PC works, and works well. Of course, we are a PC mag, and as such this conclusion isn't going to surprise many people, but all the staff just plain like games, any games on any system. It just so happens that the best ones are usually on the PC, that's all.

MPEG 3

A major revolution in PC sound is taking place...

Every now and then a significant change occurs out there in the great digital wilderness. The latest is MP3. Standing for MPEG Level 3 it is the third revision of the Motion Pictures Expert Group (MPEG) digital video standard. MPEG Level 2 has been complete for some time now. It also features high quality sound but with the inclusion of HDTV quality video. MPEG 2 will be one of, if not the only format used in playing back DVD disks.

The MPEG bunch, being the busy people they are, however, have been frenetically working away taking MP2 to MP3. So far within MPEG 3, only the audio specification has been defined and implemented. If their achievements in the sound frontier are anything to go by, then we're in for some exciting times indeed.

MP3 Audio files play at 128 kilobits a second and output at 44.7Khz, that's CD quality. CD quality in itself isn't such a big deal these days, but what's so amazing about this format is the compression ratio of 12:1. Putting that into perspective, it now means that 12 audio CD's could now be placed onto one MP3 CD. Or, taking a conventional music CD from 70 minutes to 840 minutes.

How to make an MP3 file

Creating your own MP3 file is delightfully simple. Since sampling and sequencing music on computers became big a vast number of utilities that ease the process have become available. One such utility, the MP3 makers prime component, is CDDA. CDDA actually takes a CD track off of a music CD and converts the digital audio data into a Windows wav file.

With the wav in hand (approx 36 Mb) it's only then a matter of running it through the MP3 maker and voila, at 12:1 compression you have an entire music CD track compressed into approximately 3Mb. Eventually, the entire music CD takes up about as much room as the first uncompressed track.

Playing it

The prime player out there is one known as Winplay 3. This utility offers a simple interface in the style of an old CD Player. LED fonts display the track number, time played and the MPEG frame number. The only omission from Winplay 3 (that hopefully will be addressed) is the lack of a skip function. In its present form, it's impossible to zip to the middle of a song.

Other programs have sprung up around this little marvel however. Programs that can cue hundreds of songs to Winplay 3 (which has a limit of only about 20), complete with descriptions, album names, group and performer. Using these add-on programs, it's possible to search your hard drive(s) for all the songs by Group X and play away.

There's another reality about Winplay 3 that makes MP3 playback all that more desirable. In all, it only uses about 16% of your total system resources, leaving plenty for web browsing, word processing, or even playing DirectX games.

Busted sites soon move elsewhere.

MP3 sites are the bain of the recording industry.

The piracy

With a format so perfect, piracy was bound to happen. Some could argue the years of CD oppression caused it. Others would state that it is human nature to try and get something for nothing. The reality is however, that MP3 is such a viable format that people the world over are creating and posting them on web sites for all and sundry to download.

It literally started overnight, meandering around the right IRC channels, bewildered murmuring started to echo through about a format that offered CD quality sound yet small enough to download a song in 15 minutes. The first people to take advantage of it were the "cracking" crews, who distribute unprotected pirate software. Suddenly, whole music CDs were on offer like games software and rather ironically, smaller and easier to download than entire games.

The final culmination of this communal sharing syndrome resulted in organised groups of individuals linking their pirated FTP sites together within a search engine. Known only as the "mp3 search engine", almost any kind of music, from 60s oldies and earlier, to the latest top 40 song can be found. Just entering a name or an artist will bring up enough titles for download to make publisher and artist weep alike.

If only he'd used his talents for good...

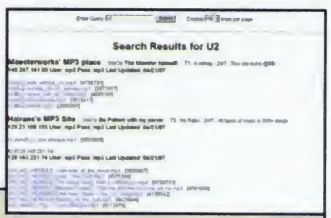
It's not all doom, gloom, piracy and robbery though. MP3 offers a lot more to the struggling artist out there. Performers with access to only a sound studio can get their songs digitally recorded quite cheaply. These new groups need not embark upon being discovered by music companies, they can instead post their music on web pages and for a nominal fee allow users to sample, then completely download their work.

In fact, we asked Sony Australia about their opinion on the format. They commented that they were investing heavily in the DVD audio specification because of consumer perception. They went on to say that if you keep bombarding them with new technology, people become overwhelmed and it will all fall by the wayside.

Of course this attitude is bound to change if MP3 offers a buck to be made. Providing there is sufficient consumer support out there however, it's eventually possible that MP3 "Vending Machines" could be found on the Net.

For a price cheaper then a music single, in about the same time it would take to drive to the shop and buy it, the same quality music could be downloaded to your own home. With integrated computer/TV/home entertainment systems, such a reality isn't that far fetched nor complicated for the less computer-exposed home consumer.

Jere Lawrence



WWW SONG SITES

NAME	DESCRIPTION	RATING
Mikes MP3 Page	If you want NIN or Lords of Acid then Mike's the man to go see	***
TEK	Now a PRIVATE website!!! ..Mail them for access	****
ID Miyaguchi's MP3 Sounds Page	Only a few songs here but loads of links and info on mp3's	***
Rabid Neurosis	DEAD AND BURIED	GONE
www.musicshoppe.com	WOW!! Has this changed or what ..now a lot more mainstream stuff to d/l as well as the off the wall stuff that was there before. Still one of the best presented sites around	*****
www.iansnc.com/jennifer	Nice site. A good mixture of songs and some links. **This is down for now...hopefully she will start it up again soon**	*** 5 (When Up)
fans MP3 Archive	40 or so songs ..most unrecognisable due to short filenames	***
Chris Lang's MP3 Site	It's back ...NEW AND IMPROVED!!! Well worth a visit. Pop, Country, Rock, Metal etc etc	****
Rolf's MPEG3 Music	Great site ... lotsa stuff ..go there NOW!!	****
http://206.10.55.20/pb/mp3/	Loadsa songs...no descriptions	** 5
http://www.asogy.stockholm.se	Now 10 songs (all rave and techno) but this is how it should be done. Title - Artist - Type - Size - Quality Now you know what you're getting before you d/l it	****
The Smashing Pumpkins Audio Archive	Over 160 songs in MP3 format ..plus interviews if that's your kinda thing	****
The Foo Fighters Audio Page	I think the title just about says it all ..25 Foo songs plus wmplay d/ds etc	***
Pizza's Pop for the Old	Quite a few songs from the 60's, 70's and 80's but only in m3u's!!??!!	** 5
GOA/PSYCHEDELIC	For Technoheads only. Only the one song so far, but more are promised ..so keep checking back	** 5
http://mordor.res.cmu.edu/mp3/	Mmmm..frames but don't hold that against them ..Bush,Guns & Roses,Pearl Jam & Soundtracks	***
JEFF's MP3 Page	This has now had a face/lft ...and it looks great ..not just Prodigy Mp3's but loads of new artists/groups to choose from now. Also has players/rippers and regcodes etc	*****

The sheer volume of downloadable recordings is staggering...

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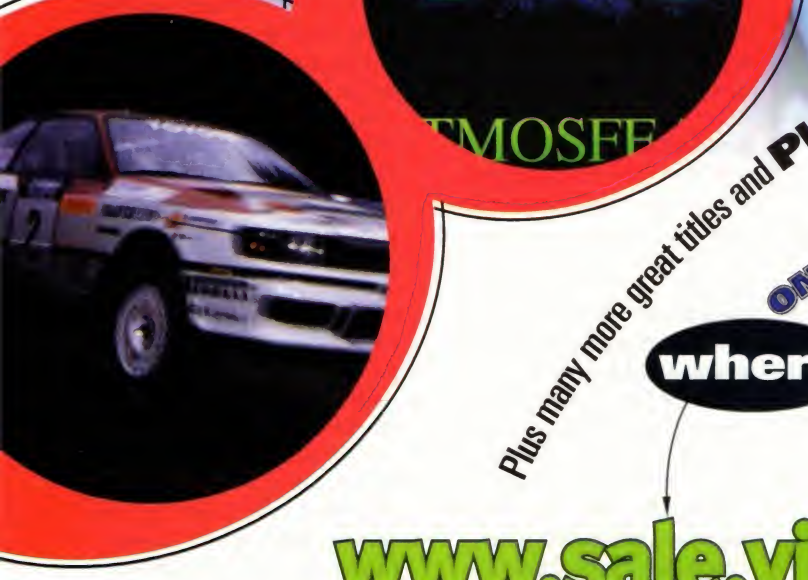

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NET PC

Mainstream internet for the masses

The Australian-made Kittyhawk is an intelligently designed Net PC from Set Top.

One of the most intriguing developments out in the vastness of the computer world is the specifications and indeed the completion of the ultra cheap Network PC. Swayed by stories of the $300 PC we embarked to find out more about this potentially viable low cost alternative.

What is a Network Computer?

Network Computers, also being called the Internet appliance, have a simple mission. To be cheaper and easier to maintain and use than PCs, and to provide access to corporate networks and the Internet. Essentially a diskless workstation, touted as "all the Internet all the time", these devices are designed to give Net access to the masses.

IBM defines the NC as a Computing Architecture with a common set of technologies that enables all PCs, network computers, and other client devices to work with all Web servers, database servers, and application servers over any network. It is a robust, scalable, and open infrastructure that will serve as the basis for the next generation of distributed computing.

NC's are possibly better defined, or associated with the VCR. Set Top industries, the group with the name that epitomises the home market for these systems, has developed a system, the Kittyhawk, that for $995.00 will plug into your TV and phone line giving access to the Internet. Through these units onto the Internet, services such as Web browsing, Electronic mail, newsgroup access, Iphone (the ability to talk to someone else across the globe digitally through the Net very cheaply), and potentially multiplayer games are possible for approx $2 a day.

Sun's Javastation is geared towards small to medium networks with a server patent enough to bear the load.

These units extend past Internet Usage though. Taking advantages of multimedia functionality within PC's the more expensive, more advanced multimedia unit incorporates an integrated Fax system, 3D Stereo Audio, Mpeg video playback, Avi video playback and full Direct X Support.

Although there is a potential market for the hardened PC user out there, the primary aim of the Net PC is to the sort of consumer that bought the Amstrad "I'm Stupid" remote control with the big coloured buttons.

Beyond the Home NC

The first reality to be addressed about the NC is that it requires powerful server hardware and robust client/server software to operate. The Network it connects to, the Internet will be host to database processing super Servers and Sun designed and implemented Java Servers.

Utilising Java, these systems can download entire applications to the end user through the Internet, without the need to purchase the software in the first place. This system means that you will never actually own a piece of software again, just permanently rent the application as you need to use it.

The business NC

The lure of a NC to a business is a hard one to ignore. Installation is as simple as connecting it the corporate LAN and booting it. From there you can specify the applications users can access by making a few changes to a centrally maintained user profile. Should the NC fail, you just swap it out for another unit since most configuration information as well as the user profile is stored centrally.

Smart Cards, secure purchasing and the future

Technology that has been brought to the NC that promises to greatly enhance Internet usage for the end user, is the implementation of Smart Cards. These devices will enable people to purchase products and services over the Internet much more conveniently and allow log ins from remote locations. By securely encrypting relative information about the user in a portable card, it would be possible to login to a machine, read your email, securely purchase an item or browse with the appropriate cost being billed to your account.

Instead of these activities being limited to the home PC, users can login to a terminal located anywhere. In the same way that we use ATMs now to withdraw money, you could insert a smart card into a NC anywhere and Surf away.

As the future is never certain, if Network Computers make the dent mega-corporations project they will, the next step could be NC laptops. Imagine being able to plug your A5 size Notebook NC device into a public access point, automatically billing usage to your personal account and extracting whatever information you require. Hollywood style global connectivity, closer then we think.

Jere Lawrence

download the demo @ www.village.com.au

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DOS/PC CD-ROM

GT Interactive Software

Monolith Productions

YET TO BE CLASSIFIED BY THE OFFICE OF FILM & LITERATURE CLASSIFICATION

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3D technews

(pics this page) Quake Mission pack- The Scorge of Armagon.

3Dfx for next Sega console

Hot of the press is news that on April 19, 3Dfx filed for an initial public offering (IPO), confirming the existence of Sega's Black Belt (Games console) and its own Banshee chipset (reported last month in 3D TechNews).

Confirmed is that 3Dfx will be using its Voodoo Graphics architecture to develop a graphics subsystem for a new Sega game console. Sega are also expected to invest heavily in 3Dfx, acquiring 700,000 of the initial 4.2 million shares that 3Dfx is offering. The agreement also grants Sega the exclusive rights to the architecture for the next three years with regard to use in home consoles.

ATI RAGE PRO with AGP

The ATI Rage Pro was demonstrated at Intel's Visual Computing Day on 24 March 97. The 3D RAGE PRO is the industry's only accelerator to unleash the full potential of Intel's Accelerated Graphics Port (AGP) and advanced processors such as the Pentium II.

DVD-enabled, the 3D RAGE PRO, with have three times the 3D performance of the previous generation Rage. The first demonstrated AGP accelerator, it supports the 2X (133 MHz) mode of AGP, which offers twice the bandwidth of chips limited to the 1X (66 MHz) mode.

The RAGE PRO will also feature DVD and video enhanced motion compensation acceleration and a 4-tap horizontal and 2-tap vertical high quality DVD video scaler, providing smooth images without the "jaggies" (jagged edges) common in today's current video technology. The scaler provides a true colour video display, independent of the graphics mode used. Already tested on developer releases of Memphis (next generation Windows 95) and Direct X 5.0, ATI claim that users will appreciate the AGP-based systems support delivered in Memphis working with the Rage Pro.

Power VR 2 gets bilinear filtering

NEC fans, or at least those disappointed with the Power VR's lack of bi-linear filtering and other enhanced 3D techniques will be jumping for joy with news of VideoLogic's upcoming PowerVR PCX2 card, called the Apocalypse 3D rev2. VideoLogic will also be coming out with a card that has both a Tseng Labs ET6000 and a PowerVR PCX2 processor to be known as the Apocalypse 5D.

The new NEC PCX2 3D, Videologic Apocalypse 3Dx card (Power VR 2) now delivers 50% more performance, making it 40% faster then the 3Dfx and unlike all conventional 3D accelerators, will continue to improve in performance with newer and faster CPUs.

The Power VR 2 now has the ability to Dither from 24-bit, or "true colour," to 16-bit colour providing a more photorealistic look. It also supports higher display resolutions and to a great sigh of relief, the inclusion of bilinear and adaptive bilinear texture filtering. Despite such radical changes, it's still a single slot half length PCI card for Pentium based Windows 95 PC's utilising DirectDraw for windowed overlay.

Potentially the most amazing news is that the price of the new PCX2 with four full version PowerVR games (WipeOut 2097, ULTIM@TE RACE, Resident Evil and MechWarrior 2) will remain the same as the current Power VR price. The card is being sent to select OEMs and Systems Integrators now, and will be available this winter.

Owners of the Power VR 1, however, will be able to upgrade to the new Power VR 2 for approx. $150.00 upon proof of purchase. (official Australian price yet to be confirmed). This makes the offer 50% cheaper than the VR 2 and

approx. 60% cheaper than the current street prices for either 3Dfx card.

S3 Virge finally gets it right

The S3 Virge has become the biggest non-accelerator in such a short time. The first card to be knocked out of the 3D race, S3 are retaliating with the ViRGE/GX chipset. It's alleged S3's latest accelerator will produce a 3X increase in 3D performance over first-generation 3D accelerators with advanced 2D and video acceleration.

Based on the S3d(R) architecture, the ViRGE/GX accelerator implements key architectural innovations, including SmartFilter technology for higher performance and higher quality texture mapping. A parallel processing perspective engine for increased throughput when MIP mapping, tri-linear filtering, transparency, atmospheric effects and Z-buffering.

Incorporated into the STB Nitro 3D, it will feature high-end 2D/3D digital video playback with ultra-high bandwidth video memory for optimum resolutions and refresh rates up to 16.7 million colours.

3D Games

Swiv 3D

On the games front, this month's hottest demo goes to Swiv 3D for the 3Dfx. Featuring super smooth movement over a fractal generated landscape (not unlike an old 16 bit classic called Virus) Swiv 3D has you controlling a chopper in an extremely addictive shoot em up.

The entire landscape is bi-linear filtered using high quality textures and enemies are all subtly textured with well applied gouraud shading and distance fogging, if you like. Swiv 3D is super fast and features the best looking object explosions to date.

Pod

Pod was released in the month of April with all the 3Dfx support built in. Although we mentioned this amazing 3Dfx title last month, it has to be mentioned again. Pod on the 3Dfx is currently _the_ most entertaining racing game for the 3Dfx.

Featuring super fast 3D with beautifully detailed textures for the roads and roadside objects, it is the first 3Dfx title to fully distance draw. That's to say that the road extends to a distant point in the horizon, as opposed to just appearing at too close a range.

Advanced features in Pod, besides the blinding speed, include transparent gourauded smoke. If you strike an opponent head on, being forcefully knocked back will generate said smoke from the tyres. It's not just a transparent texture either, more like particle 3D, the tiny objects look amazing.

Interstate 76

Activision's Interstate 76 saw it's release last month and a promise for the DirectX patch due ASAP. Even though the patch isn't ready yet, Interstate 76 is such a totally cool game that this 3D upgrade is one of the most eagerly awaited. As soon as it's available, we'll let you know.

Another feather for Activision's cap is that they've been granted the rights to distribute iD software with Armagon, the official Quake add-on their first release. Looking absolutely stunning on the 3Dfx under GLQuake, the specular lighting and crystal clear MIP mapping greatly surpass the Rendition Verite Quake.

Quake

Quake Mission pack 2 with 3Dfx support is due as we speak now and Hexen 2 has just reached Beta stages. The best news to offer however is that we've confirmed the latest version of GLQuake to work with custom levels - either off unofficial level CDs or the Internet. With custom levels offering features such as cut scenes utilising 3D cinematics and amazing new weapons, the 3D accelerated Quake experience gets no better than this.

Die Hard Trilogy

Fox interactive are also working hard to ensure support for all the accelerators out there. Independence day and Die Hard trilogy feature acceleration for not just the 3Dfx, but the Rendition and any Direct 3D compatible accelerator. These great new games are fully reviewed this month in the reviews section.

Formula 1

Formula 1 by Psygnosis has just been accelerated for the Rendition. Featuring Gouraud shading, perspective correct texture mapping, and specular highlights adding to the realism of the game. Formulå 1 is currently Rendition Ready technology-enabled out of the box.

Jere Lawrence

(right & below) Swiv 3D

(below right) Die Hard Trilogy

(left) Formula 1
(top left) POD

STB Velocity 3D

Another S3-based card has arrived. This on sports a full 8Mb and is very impressive for most applications - except games...

CHIPSET:

S3 Virge featuring accelerated MIP Mapping, trilinear filtering, video texture mapping, depth cuing and fogging, alpha blending and Z buffering.

Memory: 8Mb (4 Mb EDO VRAM, 4Mb EDO DRAM Daughter-board)

Software Included:
Mechwarrior 2 for S3 Virge
Kodak Colorific

RRP $519

WINDOWS TESTS:

Test one: (Using the official Direct 3D All encompassing tests on a Pentium 133 with 49Mb RAM)
Polygon Throughput: 0.7 kpps
Intersection throughput: 3.55 kpps
Pixel fill rate: 4.28 mpps

Test two: All test one plus bilinear filtering.
Polygon Throughput: 124.37 kpps
Intersection throughput: 0.5 kpps
Pixel fill rate: 2.87 mpps

Test three: All test one and two plus specular lighting.
S3 Virge 3D Accelerators can not support specular (or any form of) lighting.

Winbench:
1024 x 768 x 65,000 colours: 18.8 Million pixels per second.
1280 x 1024 x 16.7 Million colours: 20.4 Million pixels per second

Wizbench: Card does not support advanced lighting or texturing effects, test cannot complete.

DIRECT 3D TESTS:

fly: 26.23 fps
oct1: 54.94 fps
oct2: 60.60 fps
spher: 29.85 fps
triangl: 58.82 fps
tunnel: 17.51 fps
Twist: 37.87 fps

DOS BENCHMARKS:

3D Bench	99.6 fps
SVGA Bench	30.1 fps
Quake:	
320 x 200	28.7 fps
360 x 400	13.8 fps
360 x 480	13.8 fps
640 x 400	Not Supported
640 x 480	Not Supported

Ease of Installation:

The STB card, although not shipping with the obligatory Install CD, did manage to fit all their drivers onto one diskette. Upon starting Windows 95 with the new card installed, it detected the change of video card, asked for the driver diskette and by next reboot, the card was functioning perfectly.

Windows Performance:

The STB card, utilising the S3 Virge VX chipset, was a most unusual performer. With speeds as fast as other S3 Virges' such as the Hercules Terminator 3D, the big shock occurred when it ran faster at higher resolutions. We theorised that the card must be optimised for 24 bit colour (irrespective of resolution) and that reduction of colour was causing a performance hit.

Overall, Windows performance was great and at 1280 x 1024 16M colours, the card was faster than a 3D Blaster at 1024 x 768, 65k colours.

Utilities:

It's not often that utilities shipped with a card are that useful and normally they just waste valuable hard drive space. There's an innocuous looking utility that ships with this card, however, that's quite a catch.

Called Colorific, it is a utility that uses the downloadable gamma table functions of the STB Velocity to modify the screen settings to perfect colour. To calibrate this utility you go through a series of tests that have you choosing colours that just emerge from the background. The tests finally culminate with you sticking a device on the monitor that blends with the background and choosing the closest colour that emerges from under it's transparent sections.

The result is absolutely fantastic. The colours at very high resolutions, instead of blurring and blending into each other, become absolutely crisp and clear. The settings can also be dynamically changed for high gamma apps such as games to low gamma apps such as web surfing. The change in Kelvin levels of the Internet mode makes the screen much gentler on the old eyes after prolonged reading.

DOS Performance:

DOS Performance on this card was satisfactory. No major mode X bugs such as the 3D Blaster suffers, but no VESA support either. This meant that Quake can only be played in low resolution modes. To get the most speed out of games with the Velocity, you will need to buy a utility such as Sci tech's Display Doctor.

3D Acceleration:

Time has dealt a cruel blow to the S3 Virge, the reality is that it offers nowhere near the 3D performance of cards such as the 3D Blaster and the 3Dfx. Mechwarrior 2 for Virge which ships with the card is utterly appalling.

Firstly, the Mechs are not correctly gourauded, instead of a smooth graduation of colours, dithered dotty fills ruin the graphical effect. Although S3 Mechwarrior has the enhanced textures found in other accelerated versions, the game is so appallingly slow that it is like playing it on a 486. Even though you can turn off a lot of the features to increase speed, it defeats the purpose of a "3D Accelerator".

So...

Being able to achieve 1600 x 1200 at rock solid high Hz rates and dynamically adjust gamma colour tables in the card make it perfect for the 3D artist, Desktop publisher or Web designer.

Until S3 develops a better 3D accelerator though, these cards are not for the games enthusiast - especially not if you're looking for fast and exciting games. If however, you've already got a decent accelerator such as the 3Dfx or the Power VR and are looking for a good Windows card, this would be a good choice.

Big Screen Gamer

There is a school of gaming thought that holds that a 17 inch monitor is the perfect size for gamers. Any larger, the case went, and the greater pixel size becomes annoyingly noticeable. With the glorious advent of 3D accelerators though, this issue carries far less weight. Suddenly the 21 inch monitor has hit the Most Wanted list of many a gamer. We recently spent a day playing 3Dfx Tomb Raider on the big 21 inch ViewSonic P810. Big monitors now not only make a lot more sense, but are the way to a gaming experience far more gratifying and immersive. The ViewSonic has a very attractive case with sensibly designed and arranged controls. It'll handle 1600 x 1200 resolution at 76Hz, while a 0.25 dot pitch ensures clarity and flicker-free performance.
At $3499 it's not cheap, but compared to similarly specced monitors from the likes of Sony and NEC, the ViewSonic deserves serious consideration.

Video Blaster PCI

Video Conferencing has been long evangelized as the next level of communications technology that's both cost-effective and accessible. The reality though, has been a frustratingly jerky and hideously low-res image that has thus far driven people away. Times change. Now a number of viable home systems are becoming available.

Creative's Video Blaster has been around for a number of years now. Originally marketed as a video acquisition and editing card, it has recently been redesigned as an internet communications tool. The new PCI bus version is shipping for just $499 and is now a much more useful product for common folk.

Besides a host of powerful video editing functions, the Video Blaster is an ideal home teleconferencing system. It comes with a CCD camera (the Video Blaster is also available sans CCD camera for $299), and provided the person you're calling has a similar setup, enables long distance video calls for the cost of a local call.

Packaged as a"Multimedia Internet ToolKit", this package includes a suite of web design and multimedia tools. The Video Blaster has finally moved on from its exclusive niche into mainstream use. At the price it's a difficult product to resist.

New Hercules 3D lineup

Hercules have two new video accelerators on the market. Hercules are a trusted name in the market, their gear is always based on the most current technology and their driver support is the envy of many. Hercules always tweak reference drivers (the basic driver software as released by the chip supplier - eg. Tseng for the ET6000, VooDoo for the 3Dfx, which are then optimised to varying degrees by the hardware vendors, such as Hercules) to the limit, giving Hercules cards a speed edge over similarly chip-equipped clones.

Stingray 128/3D

This is the card to have for buyers of new systems, or those wanting to make the move to 3D who are also stuck with a slow 2D card.

It uses the VooDoo Graphics 3Dfx Rush chipset for 3D, while an Alliance ProMotion does the 2D duties. The Rush is the same glorious 3D powerhouse that gives the Orchid Righteous and Diamond Monster their magic, but has been re-engineered specifically to work in conjunction with a standard 2D VGA/SVGA chip on the same card. 6Mb of EDO RAM is on the card, 4Mb for the 3Dfx and 2Mb for the Alliance 2D.

Clearly the all-in-one solution is the way to go. We've yet to benchtest this card so can't vouch for the speed of the Alliance ProMotion, but in a reasonably fast Pentium system 2D speed is hardly an issue.

Terminator 3D/DX

While the S3 Virge can't compare to the fully-featured powerhouse that is the 3Dfx, it's a cost-effective 2D/3D solution for gamers who want the pretty effects of bi-linear filtering but can't justify paying for a 3Dfx or a hybrid card like the Stingray 128/3D.

The Terminator ships in a 2Mb version (RRP$269) and a 4Mb version (RRP$339).

The "DX" is one of the three S3 variants out there. It basically defined the RAM support. Other 3S chips are the VX (VRAM) and GX (SGRAM).

DirectSound 3D PCI

If it all works out the way Diamond wants, the "Monster" name will soon be working itself into your mind, taking up the brain space previously occupied by the "Blaster" name as synonymous with gaming. The 3Dfx-based Monster 3D is something you just have to have (unless you've got an Orchid Righteous 3D, which is basically the same card...) and now Diamond are about to do the Monster thing for sound cards.

Now, we don't feel very comfortable with Diamond's use of the term "Sound Acceleration", but what you get with the card is certainly impressive.

Monster Sound

True 3D sound positioning is one feature. We tested a beta version of the card and it worked. The card will work its magic with a 4-speaker surround sound setup, but is only marginally less amazing with a mere 2-speaker arrangement. The card uses Microsoft's DirectSound API and is not designed to compete with the Sound Blaster. In fact, the folks at Diamond recommend you equip your machine with both a Sound Blaster (which they kindly refer to as a "legacy audio component") and a Monster Sound. Reason being, the Monster is not Sound Blaster compatible. Selling a new sound card that doesn't offer Sound Blaster compatibility is a brave marketing move indeed, but as the folks at Diamond happily point out - the Sound Blaster uses yesterday's technology, the Monster, tomorrow's. This PCI card will relieve your CPU from its current burden of up to 60% just for processing sound, while it'll also save you another 15% or so if you choose to use its joystick port instead of the Blaster's.

DirectSound is the future for sound card technology and the Monster Sound is the first one out there. At $199 it represents a cost-effective boost for your gaming speed and enjoyment. We'll give you a full test-report when they actually send us one.

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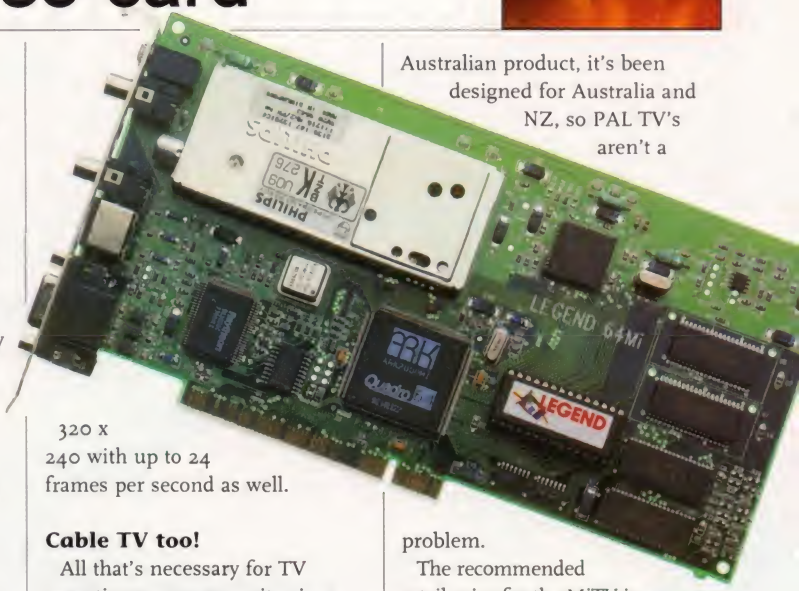
Legend 64 MiTV Video card

It's always nice to have something humming along in the background while you work, whether it's music or the TV or whatever. But imagine having a little TV right there on your desktop - no more craning your head around the corner to try to see the TV while you work, or play games. With a graphics card capable of TV and video output, you can watch the cricket (or Neighbours, or a movie and so on) in the background while you work or play - and that's pretty fantastic, we reckon.

Is TV, is good

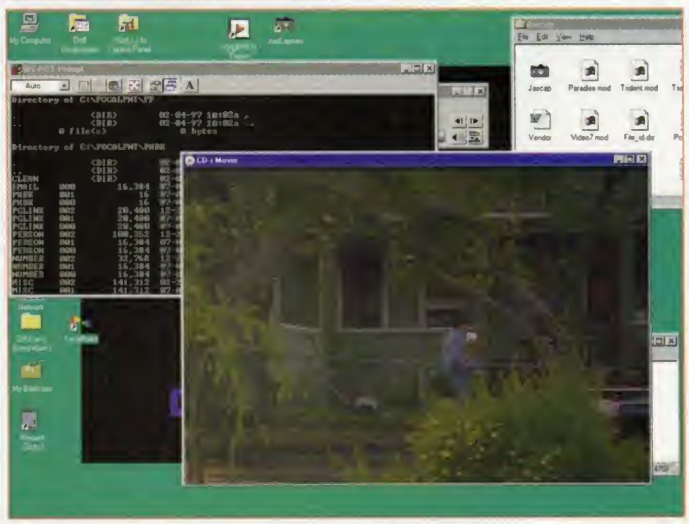
Legend make good products, and they're something we should all be proud of, seeing as they're an Australian company. Their Legend 128 video card got our 'Truly Amazing' award when we tested it last December, and now they have released another, this an integrated graphics card and TV tuner capable of video and TV output and capture. It runs on a 64-bit ARK2000Mi graphic processor and comes with 2MB EDO DRAM - which isn't upgradeable, unfortunately. 2MB is all that most people will find necessary though - as is you can get resolutions of up to 1024 x 768 in 16 bit colour with a 70Hz refresh rate, and for TV output the max is 800 x 600 with 16 bit colour @ 50Hz. Then there's the video capture resolutions; up to 320 x 240 with up to 24 frames per second as well.



Cable TV too!

All that's necessary for TV reception on your monitor is an antenna, just like any other - either a portable one or, if you're lucky enough to have a spare plug at home, it will work just as well with that as any TV. It doesn't stop there though, cable TV will also work fine, as does a VCR (either composite or S-Video) or camcorder. It's nice and easy to capture or edit the output too, so you can edit your home movies as well as play them, and store them as files on your hard drive as well. Most cool. And seeing as it's an Australian product, it's been designed for Australia and NZ, so PAL TV's aren't a problem.

The recommended retail price for the MiTV is a decent $599, and there are a couple of extras thrown in as well. For starters, you get a CD-Rom game with it (it's kind of a lucky dip, we got A-10 Cuba with ours) as well as a full length movie in CD-I or Mpeg formats (again, a bit of a lucky dip, we got Benny and Joon with ours). There's also a 5 year warranty provided, with phone support if necessary. It's a good 'un, and Legend are going to have a hard time getting their test card back from us - we wanna keep it!



Speedy 3D

While a 3Dfx-based card is all the 3D acceleration most gamers need, there is, as with all things, a need to push the envelope and dammit, build the finest 3D accelerator science can produce.

That card is the appropriately named Divine3D from Omnicomp. The Devine3D sports a Permedia 2D/3D graphics accelerator and a GLINT Delta setup processor. 8Mb of super-fast SGRAM is standard.

While ostensibly for professional CAD/CAM and 3D modelling applications, the Devine3D is also the absolute last word in gaming 3D muscle. It's fully OpenGL compliant which means it'll run GLQuake at speeds that shame any 3Dfx card.

Permedia-based cards have dropped in price dramatically over the last few months, but a Devine 3D will still set you back $1599. Call Sprinter on 02 9938 3388.

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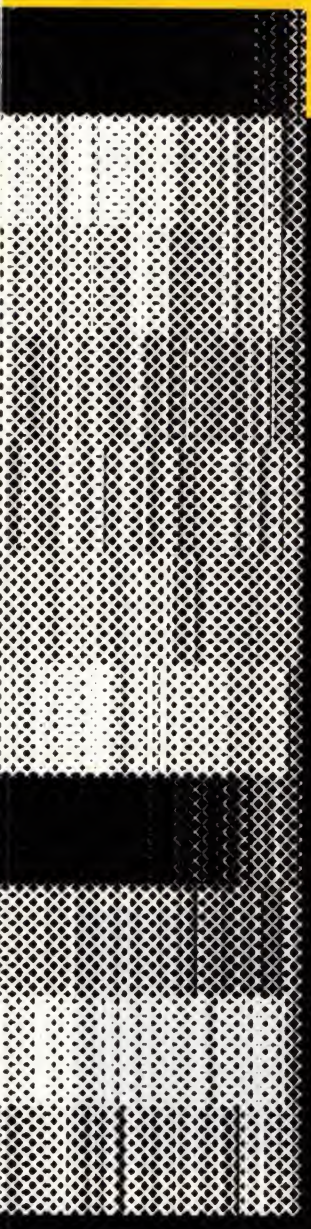

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Hot plastic bashing party PC fun

The...umm..Slammer.

For those of us that rush home at night in time to flick on the teev and take on the challenge set down by Glen and Nikki, and to have a bit of a laugh at how stupid the questions can be, there's now a game made just for us. Between 7 and 7:30pm most weeknights, millions of people can be heard screaming 'No you fool, it's the *large* intestine!' or 'Don't press the buzzer yet, Glen's scratching his cheek - that means he'll go down to five dollars for the outdoor setting!' Anyway, even if you're not into Sale (it's just not the same since Tony left, we reckon), chances are you enjoy quiz or trivia games - the success of Trivial Pursuit, and more recently You Don't Know Jack stands as testament to that. The Sale Of The Century Computer Game is an officially endorsed product - it's even got Glenni and Nikki's picture on the front, so it must be good, right? Wrong.

Jeopardy - The Computer Game

Slammin' Sale of the Century

One of the selling points of the game is a neat new peripheral device that's included with it, called the Slammer. Rather than have everyone crowd around the keyboard, the Slammer has four buzzers with a decent sized cord so that you can relax and play in comfort, one big buzzer for slamming when you know the answer, and another to make your selection with. Even though the Slammer is made of plastic and doesn't look like it'll stand up to very much slamming, it's still a cool idea - but also has some limitations, which are shown up in 'Sale' all too well. To begin with, it means that most of the questions have to be multiple choice, and the questions in Sale are often much much too easy to begin with (they make the Footy Show's Brain Strain look intellectually taxing, and that's not an easy task), and with the choice of multiple answers become laughable - for example; In soccer, which one is the only one allowed to handle the ball - the goalkeeper or the centre?. And then there's the video questions. A short clip of video is shown and then a question is asked about what a certain person was wearing. The problem is that once you buzz in you get a choice of answers, with a picture of that person in the background - a clip of a man walking along a street is shown, and then the question is 'what type of tie is this man wearing', at which point you're *shown* his tie along with four answers to choose from; three ridiculous and one that's patently obvious. And Glen and Nikki don't make an appearance either! Half the fun of watching Sale is making fun of how much of a dweeb Glen is. All up it's just a damn shame that 'Sale' wasn't made properly, it could have been good fun to play. Unfortunately it isn't, not by a long way.

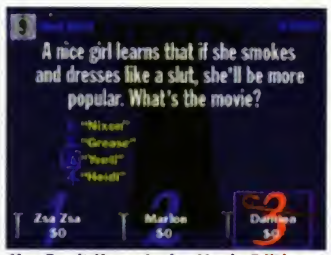
Jeopardy, the computer game

The clue is 'it's a long running show in America, and was shown in Australia for a brief period during the afternoon quiz show hour'. The Answer - 'What is Jeopardy?'. Well, I'm glad you asked; Jeopardy is another to join the ranks of Slammer compatible computer quiz games, and for any ex-Americans or those that worship our mother country (culturally, we mean) it would probably prove to be a worthwhile purchase. We say this because while the game itself is slickly produced (FMV of Alex Trebek and computer contestants that speak!), has a good set of difficulty options, and a nice easy interface, around half the questions are so Amero-centric that no-one from our fair shores will have the first idea of what the hell they're on about. A set of questions on Forests? All about American forests. A set of questions about literature? All about American literary folk, and so on. If you're American, or know all about their landmarks and culture (or lack thereof). If not, don't bother.

Jeopardy - The Computer Game

You Don't Know Jack - The Movie Edition

Yep, it's back, with new, weirder categories and an even funnier commentary. The YDKJ phenomenon took the PowerPlay offices by storm when it was first released, prompting an often blase editor to go so far as to call it 'the best computer game ever', and there were many afternoons and evenings spent white knuckled over the P,B and Q keys anxiously attempting to make sense of the questions given to us by that guy with the nasal twang we grew to love. What can we say about the movies edition? It's more of the same - except this time it's about movies (and TV), and there will be a Slammer version. Still funny, still great fun, and it still has those rolling-around-the-floor-laughing advertisements at the end. It's a must to add to the collection - and keep an eye out for the sports edition too.



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Open GL vs. Direct3D

The battle for 3D supremacy

A few years back, if you were a developer and wanted 3D graphics in your games you had to program all functions yourself. This involved not only creating the 3D environment for your game, but it also meant you had to work out how to get that information onto the user's screen - which involved writing very complex 3D rendering routines.

Usually you would have to write the game to the lowest common denominator, that is, the lowest spec machine that you expect your game to be run on. This can be very frustrating for games programmers, because they may have to leave certain functions out of the game or include complex options for reducing the detail. Programmers would often write a 3D engine and use it for their games and optimise it as they go, this often required considerable programming expertise and would take up masses of time in the games development process. If a new technology came out that they could use to enhance their 3D games, they would usually have to re-write their whole 3D engine code to take advantage of it. What this effectively means is that more time would be spent writing the game's 3D engine code than actually designing the 3D environment and other details of the game. What the game designers need is a way to create their games that will be able to take advantage of new features as they are developed, without the need to design a new graphic engine every time.

The quest for a 3D standard

The way to achieve this is to have a standard API (Application Programming Interface) to program to, that way they only need to write one version of the game that will be able to run on any configuration, from a low end machine up to a PC with the latest 3D accelerator.

Direct 3D and OpenGL were designed to do exactly that, they allow games designers to write one version of their game, which can take advantage of advanced hardware features if they are available (e.g. Mip Mapping, Alpha Blending, etc.), but will also still function if these features are not available. It is very unreasonable to expect that a game can be released that will encompass all available 3D cards and features - they would have to release multiple versions of the game, which for most companies is very impractical. These API's allow games developers to write one version of the game that will work with all 3D accelerators (e.g. ATI RAGE card, 3Dfx card, Verite card, etc.) and can thus allow them to focus more on the game development side, than on creating 3D engines for an X number of 3D cards.

OpenGL - The developer's choice

OpenGL was originally created by SGI (Silicon Graphics Inc.). A lot of people believe that OpenGL was designed only for high end graphics work (Toy Story-quality 3D graphics). This is true, it is also capable of rendering scenes with full Ray Tracing. OpenGL is also capable of scaling down enough to

enable it to be used by games programmers. Games don't require this absolute pixel quality rendering, so you can basically get away with just texture mapping and a few other tricks, OpenGL has no problems with accomplishing this.

OpenGL has been described by programmers as being user friendly and easy to work with, while still able to keep up a descent speed. OpenGL has been around a lot longer than the other mainstream 3D API and I would say it definitely shows its maturity with the ability to scale from a simple game all the way up to high end production quality output.

ID Software have certainly proved the fact that OpenGL is a viable API for games development with their release of GLQuake V0.92. If you have an OpenGL supported card, basically any of the 3Dfx based cards are perfect choices (e.g. Orchid Righteous 3D or the Diamond Monster 3D), you can play this version of Quake, it has to be seen to be believed.

GLQuake has many new features such as transparent water and reflective surfaces which all add to the games atmosphere greater than any other version released to date.

At present their are only few 3D graphics card manufacturers that are supporting the OpenGL API, hopefully this may change in the near future.

Cosmo OpenGL is a new addition to the OpenGL spec and is aimed more towards the lower end 3D graphics users using Windows 95. We may see games using this API, although don't expect too much as this API doesn't support hardware acceleration but offers superior software rendering performance over OpenGL, it will mainly be used for application development.

Direct 3D - 3D for the masses

Microsoft's offering in 3D graphics APIs is Direct3D. Direct3D is part of the DirectX suite of API's which allows games developers the ability to program games to run on Windows 95 with the speed of direct hardware access. Direct3D has two modes that can be used for creating 3D applications, Immediate mode and Retained mode. Retained mode is used for more high level programming needs so I won't go into to much detail here, while immediate mode has been specifically designed for use by games and other Windows based applications that require speed.

A few reports have filtered back from games programmers that have been finding Direct3D immediate mode very difficult to use, iD software's John Carmack for one has said that the Direct 3D API immediate mode isn't as user friendly or as easy to program as OpenGL, and there is practically no documentation for it, but I am sure Microsoft will rectify these problems in future releases (fingers crossed !).

Direct3D has an important advantage over OpenGL in the fact that it has considerably greater driver support, all new 3D capable graphics cards have Direct3D support, which effectively gives games programmers the ability to program to one common API, which in turn allows their games to function on a much greater range of cards than the OpenGL API allows currently.

The battle continues

Which one will be triumphant? Well, I would like to see OpenGL become as prevalent as Direct3D for use in games, but this all hinges on whether the 3D graphic card manufacturers can release their drivers with OpenGL support as well as Direct3D. This may not happen too quickly, as designing a device driver that supports OpenGL is not an easy task. But I believe that given enough support OpenGL could become a mainstream 3D API for games. Maybe Microsoft could fuse Direct3D with OpenGL creating a very fast and easy to use API for games developers. This would allow games developers to use OpenGL for 3D games programming, while still keeping everything tightly knit with the other game-based DirectX APIs used in their games. Fusing the two APIs together would give Microsoft greater 3D support than they currently have. Although versions of OpenGL are available for Windows, Windows NT is still currently the only Windows OS that has OpenGL support out of the box. This would also give the basic Windows installations the ability to run high end applications that utilise OpenGL in this DirectGL or Open3D (whatever it might be called) configuration, without any extra software needed.

Direct3D has become a very popular API with games programmers, as it is a standard part of the DirectX family of APIs and allows them to incorporate 3D graphics without the need to design their own 3D graphics routines. Programmers that do use OpenGL for the 3D in their games will inevitably need to utilise the other DirectX procedure calls for video display, sound and game controller support, so may just opt to endure Direct3D's Immediate Mode weaknesses for the simple fact that a Direct3D based game will have the most driver support. Whatever happens in the battle of APIs, we games players will only benefit from whatever eventuates.

Garry Wallis

>q>a SETUP with Ashton Mills

IT CAN HAPPEN ANYTIME. IT CAN HAPPEN WHEN YOU'RE PLAYING A GAME, IT CAN HAPPEN WHEN YOU'RE WALKING THE DOG. IT CAN HAPPEN WHEN YOU'RE WATCHING THE SIMPSONS. AS A MATTER OF FACT, I'VE GOT IT RIGHT NOW. IT'S SETUP TIME.

SETUP
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If you've got a problem with your beloved PC write to me at Setup, I'd love to hear from you! Actually no, I wouldn't, I'd much rather be playing games. But since I'm such a nice guy I'll do my best to solve any problems you have. If I'm in a really nice mood, I'll actually reply to you in these pages too.

When you write remember to include as much pertinent information as possible. Send your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT and any associated *.INI files for Windows that might tell me more about your problem. Give me as detailed an explanation as you can and be sure to include as much detail as possible about your PC.

Feel free to email your questions or, if you want to snail mail, please remember to write clearly or better still print your letters.

SLOW MOTION QUAKE AIN'T NO FUN

>q I have been logging on to some Quake servers through the Internet but have trouble moving around. The servers were in Adelaide and elsewhere around Australia.

Each movement is delayed by several seconds from the keystroke to the action, is this normal?

I have allocated 24Mb for winmem but this has not improved things. My machine is a Pentium 133 with 32Mb of memory and a 2Mb PCI Diamond video card.

I think I see a key and a lock flash up on the top left hand of the screen for a few brief nano seconds, is this related to my problem?

Can you help me?

Kym Millbank
Internet

>a The little graphic in the corner is Quake's way of telling you that it just isn't happy with your link. The delay between the packets it's receiving is too long, so much so that it's affecting your gameplay to the extent that Quake considers it unplayable (and you're likely to agree, unless you have a thing for slow motion games). The result is pausing between movement and actions, the cause can be one of many things (or a mixture). For starters, don't even bother trying to play Quake over the Internet unless you have at least a 28.8k modem AND a connection to a fast and reliable ISP. If you're using an el-cheapo ISP you simply won't get good response times.

The second aspect to consider is the server you're playing on - make sure IT has good response times. A server connected through an el-cheapo ISP or link will perform poorly for all players connected. The way to check this is to look at a web page such as Stomped **(http://www.stomped.com)** and look for servers which are local or have good response times. Although the response times listed are from Stomped to the servers, if you have a fast link to the US you can actually play on US servers quite well. If this isn't an option, look for Australian servers, all of which should start with an IP address of 203. Write down the addresses, open up a DOS window and ping each address (just type PING followed by the address). Once you've found one that is quite fast, connect to it and see how you go.

CD NO MORE?

>q I've got a 486DX/50 with 8Mb RAM and a two speed CD-ROM. Lately, whenever I put a CD into the drive the busy light stays on for about 20 seconds then when I double-click on the D: or access it in DOS I get the message "unable to read drive D:" or "Drive D: not ready. Abort, Fail, Retry" What is wrong and how can I fix it?

Thank you,

Corey White
Nerang, QLD

>a What's wrong? Your CD-ROM is dying. Well, ok, it's unlikely to be that bad but it is a little old, and peripherals have a habit of wearing out. Your problem, however, is probably just dirty heads. You can clean the head in your CD-ROM with a CD-ROM/Player cleaning kit available from most music/sound stores. Also some of the newer CDs produced today don't read properly in older CD-ROMs, and this applies especially to the thicker writeable CDs which you can purchase if you happen to have access to a CD burner.

WIRED FOR SOUND

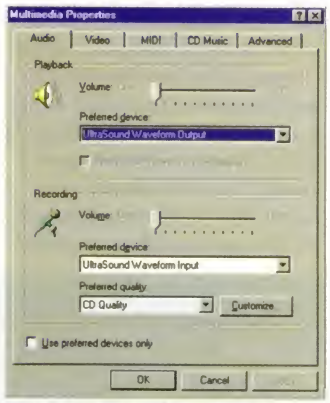
>q I have a problem (Duh!), anyway when I first bought my computer I decided to fiddle around with it and I discovered I could use a microphone and record myself. A few weeks later I was having problems with my sound on my computer so I sent it to get fixed. I was told that they just reinstalled the sound drivers to correct the problem. Anyway, when I got my computer back the sound was fixed but when I tried to use the microphone it didn't record. I'm pretty certain it's a software problem. Please help me with this problem. I have a Pentium 120 with a Soundblaster Pro. Thanks.

P.S:I don't know if this will be of any use, but before I got my computer fixed the sound for my games wouldn't work in DOS but now they do.

Mario
Internet

>a Yep, I'd say it was a software problem too. I hope you didn't have to pay to have your machine 'fixed', installing sound drivers is very easy and is essential knowledge for any hard core gamer. You should get to know your precious PC inside and out, for it is the source of much joy, and knowing how to maintain it will allow you to experience joy for much longer.

The reason your DOS games now have sound is due to the sound driver installation which would have placed some rather needed SET statements and drivers in your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT. Games can't produce sound unless they know



CHECK A DEVICES' "PROPERTIES" TO ENSURE CORRECT SETTINGS.

where to direct it, and these additions to your config files tell your games where to find your Sound Blaster.

Recording is a different matter. Whether you're doing it under DOS or Windows you'll need to make sure your MIC input is activated. Most soundcards allow you to turn on and off your MIC and LINE IN ports, or select between them as a recording source. Also, depending on your driver software, you may find your MIC port has its own input volume control. Under DOS you'll need to use a mixer program (which should have come with the SB). To change these settings, under Windows just open the Multimedia folder from the Control Panel and make sure that under Audio you have your Sound Blaster's MIC input selected and an appropriate volume set.

LONG LIVE DOS 6.2!

>q When I am in Windows 95 and go to the DOS prompt, I have 612k of conventional memory available. But if I reboot in DOS mode I only have 564k. I wasn't having any problems with any games until I installed Flashback. It needs 580k minimum to run with music & sfx. It runs okay without the sfx etc but it's pretty lame without them. Can you suggest any ways of getting more conventional memory.

DEVICE=C:\WINDOWS\HIMEM.SYS
DEVICE=C:\WINDOWS\EMM386.EXE RAM
DOS=HIGH,UMB
FILESHIGH=30
BUFFERSHIGH=30
STACKSHIGH=0,0
FCBSHIGH=1

DEVICEHIGH=C:\WINDOWS\MOUSE.SYS
DEVICEHIGH=C:\PBTOOL\CR_ATAPI.SYS /D:MSCD0001
[AUTOEXEC.BAT not reproduced here]
Sincerely,
Andrew McCreadie
Kirribilli, NSW

I'm glad you brought this topic up Andrew, because it's one of my pet peeves in Windows 95 and it's something every gamer should be aware of, so I'll devote a little more space than normal to your letter.

As you've correctly noted, a DOS prompt under Windows 95 gives you ample 'low DOS' memory. This is because Windows is managing your memory above the 1M boundry and can allocate memory for a DOS window at will. Also, because the DOS window works 'through' Windows 95, all CD-ROM, mouse and sound drivers don't normally have to be loaded in the DOS window, thereby freeing up low DOS memory.

Booting to DOS, however, is a different story. In DOS you need to load drivers for everything you intend to use and <dramatic pause> this is where DOS 7 that comes with Windows 95 really stuffs things up. The new HIMEM.SYS and associated MSDOS files that come with DOS 7 are, like many other Microsoft products, bloated beyond capacity. In an attempt to integrate Win95 into DOS 7 (Win 95 simply runs on top of DOS 7, but cannot run on top of DOS 6) Microsoft made so many adjustments to DOS that to perform a clean, empty, DOS boot in DOS 7 with nothing but HIMEM.SYS and COMMAND.COM leaves you with around 560k. DOS 6.2 would leave you with around 610k. And as we all know, for some games, low DOS memory is everything.

The sad thing is, there's no direct solution. You need DOS 7 to run Windows 95. However, loading all your DOS drivers (sound, CD-ROM, mouse) under DOS 7 normally leaves you with less than 500k - this is worse than DOS 5! Even if you try and replace the DOS 7 HIMEM.SYS (which is the handy file that loads DOS into upper memory to free up low memory) with the DOS 6.2 HIMEM.SYS, you won't find any significant improvement because the DOS 6.2 HIMEM.SYS is designed for DOS 6.

The only solution is to keep both DOS 6.2 and DOS 7/Win95 on your system, and for this you have two options:

A) Use a very handy commercial program called System Commander which allows you to install DOS 6 and Windows 95 and boot them both from the same primary partition - System Commander handles all the copying of system files to boot the operating system of your choice.

B) Install DOS 6.2 and then install Win95 over the top and, when prompted during installation if you wish to 'back up' your old DOS files, say YES. Later, you can press F8 during Win95's boot sequence and select to boot your old DOS 6.2 files.

In the meantime, for your specific system, you can remove both the EMM386 line and your MOUSE.SYS driver line from your CONFIG.SYS to free up a little extra memory. You don't really need EMM386 unless you run a game that needs EMS/XMS and doesn't use a protected memory bootstrap like DOS4GW. As for the mouse, you can load this as a program from DOS once you've booted, no need for the MOUSE.SYS file. I doubt, however, it will be enough for you to run Flashback.

DOS 6 is still the best gaming platform, and every hard core gamer should have a copy of it on their system!

Loud is always better

I have got my stereo hooked up to my computer, putting all the sound into the Line in port, and it's quite clear although I should get bigger and meatier speakers as some things I sample get distorted in the louder bits. The sound often has a fuzzy sound, with low volume samples. Would getting bigger speakers fix this?
Steven Marshall
North Mackay, QLD

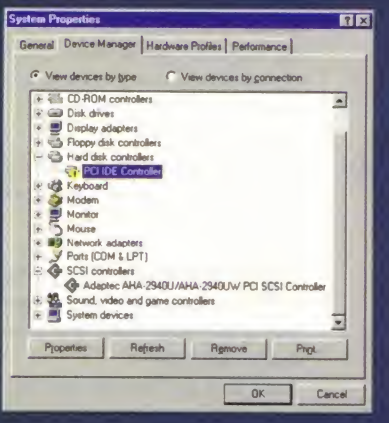
Bigger and meatier speakers are always good! Getting bigger speakers is always a smart move, if you can afford it. However if you're getting distortion it's most likely that the sound is getting amplified twice — once in the soundcard and once by your amplifier. The solution is to turn down the internal volume on your sound card using a mixer program and let your stereo do the amplifying. Also make sure that you've connected your sound card to your amplifier on your sound card's NON-AMPLIFIED port. Oh, and turn down the bass just a little bit :).

Random Access

Welcome to Random Access, a column dedicated to interesting, useful and informative tips about anything and everything to do with your PC. Be it hardware, software, DOS or Windows you'll find tips and tricks listed here every month.
If you have some tips of your own you'd like to share with other gamers such as yourself, feel free to send your tip into Setup.

Stopping Windows 95 bugging you about devices

Sometimes Windows can be a pain where the sun don't shine, and one such time is when it thinks that it knows when you want to install new drivers for the devices in your system. So, assuming your system doesn't conform to the 'Wintel' standard, how do you tell Windows to politely go away and stop bugging you? Well, true to Microsoft's form, you can't. It's yet another 'feature' imposed upon you by Bill and his minions. However, you can at least circumvent the annoyance.



GET TO KNOW WIN 95'S DEVICE MANAGER - IT'S THE FIRST PLACE TO LOOK WHEN THINGS DON'T WORK RIGHT.

If you just want Windows to stop prompting you to install a driver when you really don't need to you can remove the device as per normal from the Device Manager in Control Panel and, after your second reboot, when it prompts asking you wether or not to install a driver, select 'Don't install a driver and don't prompt me again'. However, also true to form, this doesn't always work and although you've told Windows not to bug you it may decide it knows better and start bugging you again. If this happens, there is one other avenue of relief:

If you're sure you don't need the device at all (and make sure you're sure) click on Properties of the selected device and then un-check the 'Original Configuration' box. From now on you shouldn't be prompted.

Stopping Windows 95 bugging you about logon stuff

Sick and tired of typing in a user name when you're not even on a network? This problem affects many a gamer who has installed networking support for the purpose of playing multiplayer games. Unlike the above 'feature', this can be easily disabled.

Open Control Panel and double-click on the Network icon.

Pull down the Primary Network Logon listbox and choose Windows logon.

Make sure you have no password set by clicking Passwords in the Control Panel and setting the password fields to be blank.

Trim that fat

If you want to squeeze every bit of performance out of your system, be sure to defragment your drives on a regular basis. Defragmenting will improve disk access because your files will be contiguous and the drive heads won't have to jump all over your drive to read in that 35M Quake PAK file.

At least once a month you should go over your drives and delete anything you don't particularly need. Then use a defragmenting program such as Disk Defragmenter that comes with Windows 95 or Speedisk that comes with Norton. Note, if you use Windows 95 you MUST use a Windows based defragmenter, for long file names aren't supported by older DOS defragmenters and using these will cause some major havoc under Windows 95.

? * ORACLE

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FATE OF ATLANTIS

? Help Me!
I am really stuck in Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis. I have rescued Sophia from the Dungeon and am now in a room with a frog statue and a spindle. I have tried all the codes on the stone disks with the spindle (all 64 of them), but every time I get the code wrong, Indy says "Nothing again, what's 'well aligned' mean I wonder?"
I.M. Qwiste
Mirrabooka, WA

* *Greetings Qwiste. This month, with the ban of LucasArts adventures lifted, how appropriate that the first question I pull out of the Oracle's bag is an Indy one. Your answer is as follows. When you get to the room with the big mother machine, use the spoked wheel on the peg in front of the machine and go pour the lava in your cup in the funnel. The machine will smoke, gears will turn, lights will light, and the animal at the bottom will spit out ten beads into the dish. Repeat the process and it'll spit out about fifteen more. When you get to the crab room, you have to use the rib cage to capture a crab. You have to bait it first, you can either use the wad of gum or the sausage in the cage. Put the cage in the pool and you'll catch something. Find the room with the double doors, there'll be a little fish statue that you can feed beads but the door still won't open. Use a bead in the eel statue and throw it in the water, feed the fish statue a bead and the doors will open.*
Go to the canal. There'll be a big octopus in the water. Whip the crab in the cage in the water. The octopus will leave (with a burp) and you can cross over to the other side. Get onto the crab thing and put a bead in its mouth. Go around (go left) and use the stones on the spindles to open up the gates. You'll eventually reach a section where there's another flight of stairs. Go up and in the room and get the crescent machine part in the cupboard. Close the cupboard door and look at it. Draw the pictures onto a piece of paper.

TOMB RAIDER

? I recently purchased Tomb Raider and I'm enjoying it greatly, bar one hitch. I'm stuck in "Palace Midas" where you have to put the lead bars in the holes in the walls. I've got all three bars and I'm in the room, but every time I try to put the bars in the holes, Lara says "No".
What should I do? Thanks for your effort and keep up the good work.
Ben Shaw
Karalee Qld.

* *This should help you Ben. I've given you the completion of the Midas level, and a start to the next level.*
Head back up the ramp and the stairs. At the top go to the corner and do a standing jump over the spikes to the column. Make a series of jumps to cross this room starting with the column on your right. When you reach the last column jump into the door then jump right back to the column.
You can now safely shoot the gorilla who just woke up in the room beyond that door. When he's dead enter the room and get the lead bar. Jump back to the pillar then down to the door below taking a small amount of damage. Return the 5 witches and move the middle switch UP and the far left switch DOWN then return to the start room with the pool. Head down the stairs and into the garden.
Kill the 2 gorillas and get the medkit off the roof near the back. You can get to the roof by climbing the wall on the right. On the roof turn and head down the passage to the MIDAS Chamber. Stand next to the stone hand and use the lead bars to turn them to GOLD! Climb up the right side of the MIDAS stone and save your game. Return to the garden and go to the right corner next to the gate. Walk sideways behind the tree to find the concealed lever to open the gate and the final SECRET #3. Enter the gate and up to the first pair of blades. Wait for the blades to shut then jump through them as they open. Get the shotgun shells, magnum clips and medkit then repeat the process to get past the blades. Make your way back to the orange pillar room then turn left and enter a new door. Continue forward and kill the lion then head up the stairs and out onto the ledge. Get the shotgun shells and save your game. Go down the stairs and through the right door. Use your new gold bars in each of the 3 slots then enter the open door and slide down the ramp and finish the level.

Tomb Raider- fire trap

Cistern - Items: 27 - Secrets: 3 - Kills: 27
Upon starting this level immediately roll and drop to the floor drawing your guns and wasting the rat. Push the block forward 2 times then push it to the right to access the switch. Shoot the rats that come through the wall that just opened. Go through the white door and get the medkit then return to the previous room and go down the hole and run outside to the bridge. Go forward until you are past the rails then jump to the pillar at your right. Shoot the rats as you descend the stairs then from the final step turn to your right and jump and grab the crevice. Shimmy left to the ledge then drop down. Take the shells then jump back to the next crevice and continue left until you can climb up. Turn right and climb some more then run along the ledge and get the Rusty Key.
Return to the other end and climb down, then hang and drop to the bricks below. Jump to the ledge on your right and go up the stairs. Your favourite sniper is lurking about so shoot him until he runs away then climb the right wall where he was shooting you from. Jump to the next ledge on your right then jump up and grab the ledge above you. Get the medkit then go to the top of the slope on your right. Turn left, jump and grab the ledge and climb up into SECRET #1 - shotgun shells.
Now jump back to the slope and jump back again to land on another ledge with 2 shotgun shells. Do a safety drop to the room below.
Back at the wall you climbed for Secret #1 you can now run the opposite direction and jump to a ledge then jump again to the next ledge where you can fine a medkit and some more shells. Do a safety drop to the ledge below the medkit and slide down the ramp ending up in front of a hole in the floor which you can enter and go swimming. Avoid the rats and swim into the tunnel. Climb out and kill the pesky rat that bites you as you exit. Go up the steps and jump to the ledge then jump again to the ledge on your left and pull yourself up to get the 2nd Rusty Key. Go forward and hang from the ledge so you can shimmy to the left and drop to the ledge with 2 rats - kill them! Continue forward and slide down the ramp to the save game gem. Continue forward sliding down another ramp to some statues. Kill the 2 rats and the 2 crocodiles. You may have to tease the crocs into swimming into your target range by taking a dip.
Climb the stairs on either side of the ramp then face the water - turn right and jump over to the bridge. Go around the bridge to the other side then climb the wall, turn right

and climb to the top ledge. Go up some steps and jump to the ledge with the railing then turn right and jump to the next ledge then turn left and jump to the door where you get to use one of those Rusty Keys. Enter the room and climb to the ledge on your left. Turn and shoot the 2 gorillas then jump to the next ledge and shoot that sniper from above until he runs off. Jump to the next ledge and get the medkit then do another jump to the high ledge. Jump backward into the alcove and get the magnum clips then do a running jump back to the highest ledge, turn around and jump and grab the crevice above the alcove. Shimmy to the right and drop to the ledge then drop through the hole on your right and run forward to go down the ramp. Shoot the croc in the room then get on the pedestal. Shoot the second croc who can't reach you now then enter one of the passages to alert the 3rd croc of your presence. Kill the rat and get the medkit then return to the big room with the dead crocs. Save your game (if you didn't already). Climb the wall above the pedestal then turn and jump to the ledge then do a running jump to the next ledge and one more jump to the ledge on the right. Go forward and drop to the ledge below then grab the crevice and shimmy over to the white door. Use the switch and enter the door. Jump over some spikes and into the pit where you can shoot 2 more rats then drop into a green hole. Shoot another rat then drop to the ground. Go through the door and shoot the rat to your right then climb the stairs by the Gold Door.

Ultima 8

I'm stuck in Ultima 8. I have seen Lithos and exited the catacombs with the heart of earth, now, what do I do to enter Lothian and to save Devon.

Laurie Janson
Gladstone, Qld.

Run back to the Necromancer and tell him of your progress. Run outside of the building but within the gate of the tomb and on the northern edge you will find Lothian. Double-click on her and return to the Necromancer. He will give you the Key of the Scion.

The Neverhood

Great Mag, the score you gave The Neverhood put no doubt in my mind that I needed to purchase it, so I did. You guys made me buy it, now you guys tell me how to solve it! I'm in the room with the glass thing in it and the annoying laser crystal puzzle that's inside the glass thingy, what do I do?

Adam
Bilpin, NSW

Firstly Adam, the Oracle answers out of compassion, not obligation. You're lucky, one more use of the word thing or thingy and your letter would have been submitted to the circular filing system. Your answer is as follows. Inside the room with the large glass dome, when the lights are on you will see the name Bobby on the outside of the Machine. Turn the lights off and go back inside the Machine. The letters in the name correspond to the colours in the spectrum of visible light that you learned about back in high school. If you that skipped school that day it goes: ROYGBV. That's Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Violet. Modify the machine to make the same colours as the letters in Bobby. When you come back out again you should be little.

Little Big Adventure

I'm currently stuck in Little Big Adventure. I've destroyed the teleportation and mutation center. I also have Dr Funfrocks sabre and the 4th level of power but what do I do now?

Nicholas Tsang,
Woodcroft, NSW

On Brundle Island, once inside the building you will find a robot clone looking exactly like Zoe. When you free 'her' from the cell thinking 'she' is Zoe, you will captured by the doctor himself. Don't worry, this is exactly what you want to happen! Dr Funfrock will tell you the rest of the plot then throw you in another prison cell. This cell is almost exactly the same as the one you were in at the start of the game, and can be escaped in the same way. When you are out of the cell, recover possession of your belongings from the locker, then head into the cloning room.
Once inside here, kill as many of the robots as you can with your ball of power, then head over to the far wall where you will find another 'S' symbol. Use the horn on this to make a hole in the wall, then climb through here to find the third runic stone.
At the stone you will find out the location of the Well of Sendell, and also a magical sword. Now use the flask of water on the stone and you'll see an animation of the building exploding, and you will end up standing looking at the ruins.
Walk back into the ruins and exit the screen into a construction site. Explore this site until you find a green Grobo, then talk to him until he gives you the key to the unused bulldozer.
When you have the key, use it to get the bulldozer going, then use the bulldozer to move the rocks that block your passage northwards. When the path is clear, follow it around, dodging soldiers, vehicles and workmen as you walk. When you get to the gate, open this and go through towards the Well Of Sendell.
The Well itself is at the top of a massive green-rock mountain with three workers drilling on it. Kill these workers, then climb the rock to find Dr Funfrock and Zoe - this time the real one!
Fight with Dr Funfrock for a while, using the magical sword as your weapon. After a while you will force him over the edge of the rock.
When this has happened, talk to Zoe, then jump down the Well.
At the bottom you will meet up with Dr Funfrock again and this time you must fight to the death.
Good Luck.

Lesiure Suit Larry 2

Please help me! I'm stuck in Leisure Suit Larry 2. I'm inside the plane and I've got the airsick bag and I'm wearing the parachute. I've sat in front of this game for over 5 hours in one session trying to open the emergency door!! Please tell me how to open it!

Daniel Fernandes.
East Preston, NSW

5 hours straight! Wow, with patience like that, you should become an Oracle. Just practice on getting no sleep for days on end and utilising caffeine to it's fullest potential and you never know! Anyway, here's the answer you need!
On the plane, as soon as you sit down, give the pamphlet to the man next to you. Go to the back of the plane and wear the parachute. Open the emergency door with the bobby pin (Use pin (on door)).
When it shows the scene where you're falling through the sky, pull ripcord. When you find yourself in the tree, cut rope.
On this next screen, pick up the stick and crawl under the bush with the bees. On the next screen, wait til the Annaconda comes after you and HOLD STICK. On this screen, follow the bright patches near the bottom of the screen to avoid the quicksand. Depending on your colours, this may be hard to find, but you'll make it. On this next screen, find the right vine and JUMP.
When you get onto the vine, type JUMP again. Keep going until you reach the other side of the river.
Find the vine you can take and GET VINE... move either to the right or up, it doesn't matter. Now sit back and watch the cartoon for the next five minutes or so. When you get to the chasm, go back down to the village, back to the screen where the fire was, and get ashes. Go back to the chasm and throw vine.
If you're close enough you can swing on the vine across the chasm. Keep going until you get to the bottom of the glacier.
Find the right place and type THROW ASHES. Go up to the top of the mountain where the elevator is. Go to the edge of the chasm, I always use the part where it widens into a whole near where the steam comes out. Type PUT BAG INSIDE TONIC BOTTLE. That worked for me. It's very sensitive here to the exact wording.

Tomb Raider-Midas' hand

ORACLE

Return to Zork

Congratulations on an excellent magazine. I'm stuck in Return to Zork, can you please help me. How am I supposed to get out of West Shanbar after I have the Box, Key, Crank, Waifs Gift, Coins, Bonding plant and the battery?

Corey McMahon
Newcastle, NSW

Here's your answer plus a little more.

After getting the battery, and the zorkmids and tickets from the cash register, put the battery into your tele-orb. Now, go back until you're facing the bridge, and go down on the right. Give the waif the tickets, then fill the flask with river water. Go back to the old mill, and go down the trap door. Use Boos keys on the door. Exit the new mill through the door on the right. Move around freely here, until you get a feel for where various locations are. From East Shanbar (where all the little shops are) select the red building, which is Moodock's. Click on the Survivor Game Board, and beat Moodock at Survivor. (real easy)
He gives you a sword, and a coin. Take them and leave. Go to the striped building which is the blacksmiths. Give him the sword and then leave. Cross the bridge into New West Shanbar and you should be at a fork, with a Hero's Memorial. Bear left at the fork. At the Fool's Memorial fork, grab the book and bear right. (again, wander, with the lack of compass directions, it is sometimes hard to find a location). You should now be at Pugney's Ranch. Go up to the red house, and click on the window. When he starts yapping, be apologetic and he'll give you permission to take the box of bras on his property. Take the box of bras.

Monkey Island 2

I've been stuck in Monkey Island 2 for ages and it's really getting to me! I just came second in the spitting contest, but how do I get up the big tree? Also, how do I get a costume to go to the Mardi-gras at the mansion on booty island.

Adam Brookes
Bilpin, NSW

After getting second place in the spitting contest, Try spitting again, this time only when you see the womens scarf is flying (this indicates that it's windy) and you can win the contest. You'll get a plaque.
Go to antique shop and sell the plaque to the dealer for 6000 pieces of eight. Talk to Captain Kate. Charter the ship but don't go to sea yet.
Phatt Isle
Borrow the book "Disaster : Great shipwrecks of the century". Read the book and note down the location of the sunken monkey. Booty Isle, Talk to Captain Kate again. Look for sunken treasure. Go to the location indicated in the book. Dive for treasure. When you have found the ship, pick up the head piece. Use the anchor to go up. Go to antique shop. Give the head piece to the dealer, get the map piece. To get into the Mansion, you'll need to Talk to the guard and find some reason to get him away. Go upstairs. Use book (any one will do) to swap the book from the governor. Look at the book. It's contain all the famous quotes of many pirates.

Albion

I have started playing the Albion demo that was on the October cover CD and when I put the pistol from the com room in the wall cabinet on the service desk, whenever I go back there to get it, it's gone! Also, how do I get some gold?

Jason Kerley
Lewiston, SA

Addressing your gun problem Jason, try this at the COM room and leave by passing some security guards. Note that they will search you and take the pistol if you have it. Now go back for the gun - leaving the way you entered instead of past the guards (which you cannot do originally because you pass a one way door). Do search every room you can. You will also get to Snoopy's room then, which contains some more ammo. To get gold, explore the entire dungeon for experience and loot (and fun for some). The entity will then tell you how to increase your attributes after you promise him the music crystal. This is critically important - you REALLY need this boost. You get three attributes up one at a time - to get the third up you need to pickaxe a wall. You have to make a path of light. What you do is walk from one glowing rainbow toadstool shaped like a triangle to another in the room where your footprints glow - this opens a wall.
To finish the quest go see Frill, the old Iskai in the council house. He tells you to go see Bradir in the Former Guild in the northwest of town. Bradir will fight you but is not a challenge. After the problem is solved, you may think that it is a pity you could not keep that beautiful little Iskai Dagger. Well, you can. Although the leader took it away, go back to the Former Guild and talk again to Bradir. When you end the conversation, he will give you 100 gold and the dagger.

Noctropolis

Please, Please help! I can't get past the gargoyle at the church in Noctropolis. Also, how do I get past the guard at the construction site??

Craig Jaundrell
Tamworth, NSW

Gargoyles getting you down? Brighten their day with a few thousand volts. Talk to the boy sitting on the fence, if you like. Get the wire to the left of the fence and the loose metal fence strut. Open the access panel in the right fencepost. Use the wire and strut to kill the gargoyle.
Talk to the secretary, Wanda. Mention how warm it is in the lobby, and agree to convince Leon the workman to fix the air conditioning in order to see Sam Jenkins. (If you came here earlier, this wouldn't have been a possible conversation thread.)
Go through the right door into the A/C room. Talk with Leon to turn on the air. When this is unsuccessful, talk to Stiletto and let her find out about the A/C. Move the red switch to turn the A/C back on. Back in the lobby, get Wanda to let you into Sam Jenkins' office. Talk with him about his boss, Ms. Shoto. Go back into the lobby and talk with Wanda about Ms. Shoto. Pick up the elevator access card by the desk and when Wanda goes upstairs, head for the elevator and use the card. Talk with Ms. Shoto on the 99th floor about the Sunspire building and it's source of funding.

Betrayal at Krondor

For many months, myself and my family have been stuck in Betrayal at Krondor. After fruitlessly searching through information sources I have decided to come to your help. How do I finish Chapter 3?

Ben Lowry
Redcliffe Qld.

The objective in chapter three is that James, Owyn and Gorath must discover who was responsible for killing the King's soldiers at the Black Sheep Tavern. They must solve the mystery of the spyglass and the spider, then find enough evidence to convince Arutha that Nighthawks are operating in the area. You should start by talking to the people in and around Romney.

The people responsible for killing the King's men at the Black Sheep vern can be uncovered by talking to the people in and around Romney, but you will learn the most valuable information by heading North toward the town of Kenting Rush. Check out the Temple of Kahooli North of town and talk to the Priest.
At the Temple of Kahooli prooven you are pious in the eyes of their god. To do this you must drop ALL your food in a bag, then use the ENCAMP option until all your characters are "starving." Only then should you enter the temple and talk to the priest.
The priests at the temple of Kahooli will implicate Navon Du Sandau as the leader of the Nighthawks and the man responsible for slaying the King's soldiers. You will find him on the road, in or around the town of Kenting Rush. Having killed Navon Du Sandau you must now find evidence of Nighthawk involvement in a Moredhel attack on the Kingdom... to take back to Prince Arutha in Krondor. Find what you seek behind the waterfall, which is just North of the Temple of Banath, between Cavall Keep and Prank's Stone. It will be down a dirt road that branches West off the main road. Enter the caverns behind the waterfall, move your cursor around near the base of the falls until it changes to the word ENTER, then press your left mouse button. You will need a "Knight's Piece" found at Kenting Rush (by attempting to use the well on the South side of town.) to get past the door.
Hey, I couldn't unlock the virtue well at Kenting Rush! The lock on the well in Kenting Rush can only be opened with a "virtue key." You will find such a key in the shop in Kenting Rush. There is also a key located in a grave North of Prank's Stone, next to the river.
Once you've entered the caverns behind the waterfall, head NE. You will need Navon Du Sandau's cellar key to get into his room. Once inside, you will find a Moredhel wordlock chest, which contains the evidence you need to end the chapter! The answer to the riddle is: "Darkness."

CODE

CHEATS FOR LOSERS TO MAKE THEM HAPPY LOSERS.

BLOOD

To enter a cheat code, you must press 'T' to go into talk mode, then type in the code and press ENTER. Cheating will cause the game to not tell you how many kills or secrets there should be on that level, or how many of each you have managed to achieve.

BUNZ = All Weapons, Ammo and Guns Akimbo.
CALGON = Level Warp.
CAPINMYASS = Disable God Mode.
COUSTEAU = 200 health. Scuba suit.
EDMARK = Displays "Those were the days".
EVA GALLI = Toggle Clipping.
FORK BROUSSARD = No Ammo, Armor or Items. 1 Health. Delirium.
FUNKY SHOES = Super-Jump.
GOONIES = Gives you the full map of the level.
GRISWOLD = All Armor.
HONGKONG = Same as "LARA CROFT".
I WANNA BE LIKE KEVIN = God Mode.
IDAHO = All Ammo & Weapons.
JOJO = Delerium.
KEYMASTER = All Keys.
KEVORKIAN = Suicide.
KRUEGER = Sets you on fire. Displays "Flame Retardant".
LARA CROFT = All Weapons & Infinite Ammo. Displays "Lara Rules."
MCGEE = Sets you on fire. Displays "You're Fired".
MONTANA = All Ammo, Weapons and Items.
NOCAPINMYASS = God Mode.
ONERING = Invisibility.
RATE = Displays current frame rate.
SATCHEL = All Items.
SPIELBERG = Level Warp. Disables all cheats.
SPORK = 200 Health.
STERNO = Temporary Blindness.
TEQUILA = Guns Akimbo.
VOORHEES = Displays "I will not cheat, I will not cheat" and if repeated says "I am a compulsive cheater"

OUTLAWS

OLASH = ulimited ammo
OLPOSTAL = all weapons and ammo
OLREDLITE = logic toggle, turns off enemies, they don't fire or move until code is typed in again.

DX-BALL

At the main screen:
CTRL-F1 = Board editor
During gameplay:
CTRL-F1 = Normal paddle
CTRL-F2 = Grab paddle
CTRL-F3 = Add guns to paddle
CTRL-F4 = Longer paddle
F5 = Change music

HUNTER HUNTED

To use these codes, type them in then press Enter:
COLE = Invincibility and all weapons
RAYL = Invincibility
INVINCIBLE = Invincibility
LUKASZUK = All weapons
TREVOR = Full ammo
SNELLINGS = Full health
These codes change the colour of your character:
VINCENT = Gray
BLUE = Blue
SAGE = Green
AVACADO = Light Green
OCHRE = Brown
HAHN = Brown

HYPER 3D PINBALL

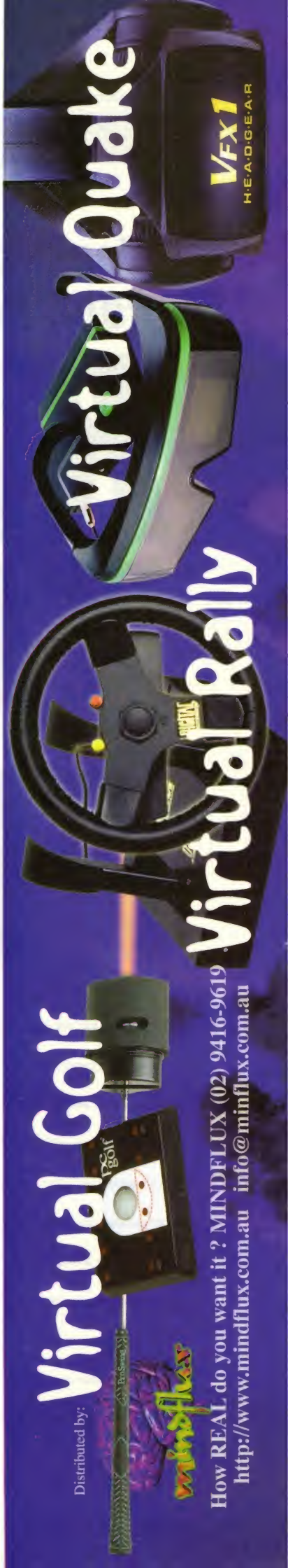
Choose a pinball table and start a new game.
Press <ESC> and type "**kermit**" (without the "") and press <enter>
Press <ESC> and type one of the following codes and then press <enter>
KICKBACK = Ball never leaves play
EXTRABALL = Guess what? You're right, an extra ball.
PICKUPBALL = It is supposed to give you the ability to place the ball anywhere on the table using your mouse.
ALOADOFBALLS = Gives you 98 balls.
JOSHUAJEIN = Disable Tilt.
If you want to deactivate a cheat just type the keyword (ex: kickback) again and the cheat will be turned off.

TOXIC BUNNY

Type these in after pressing pause...
BREED = Get a new Bunny.
AEIOU = Money, money, money...
WASTE = Throws away all your canisters.... and then?...
BOING = Jumps to Next Level.

ARCHIMEDEAN DYNASTY

To use these codes, hold down both CTRL keys while you press the number:
0 Finish mission
1 Invincibility
2 Unlimited torpedoes
3 Unlimited cannon ammo



Hackers used to be cool, now they just KILL THE FUN

The Internet has not only changed the way we communicate with each other (using email, Usenet, WWW for example), it has also changed gaming. Next to 3D accelerators, online gaming is the next big revolution in how and what we play. The first stage of this revolution was multiplayer gaming. From the early days of networking a few computers or connecting them via the modem, mutliplayer gaming has become big commercial business. You can now subscribe to a service, and the service will provide you with a stable environment with which you can play deathmatch Quake, Warcraft II, or Command & Conquer. However, the next stage in this revolution is Online-specific multiplayer games - that is, games that can only be played against other people over the net. Online gaming is only now beginning to reach the public market.

Hacker = dickhead

The code to handle such games is much more complex than that of a single player game. To interact with the many other players online, there is data communication between the client (the game that is stored on your hard drive) and the server (the computers that manage all the data as a whole, run by the online gaming provider). And when there is data being transmitted over the net, there will always be people that will want to tinker with it. This is causing major headaches for online gaming developers, and is proving to be the Achilles heel to healthy growth of this area. Players that cheat and change game data ruin the experience for the other legitimate online players.

After playing for months, working hard at collecting an impressive arsenal of weaponry and building up your statistics, a player that has maxed out all is stats simply by hacking comes up to you and kills you. Not a lot of fun, eh? It's worse when you are paying an hourly or monthly fee to play the game. Simply put, players that aren't enjoying themselves may discontinue their subscription, and give the service a bad name. Definitely not what the developers want, nor what the majority of other gamers that are otherwise enjoying themselves want. Hacking and cheating has though, funnily enough, forced developers to rethink gaming design at the most basic level. For the objectives of playing with hundreds, maybe thousands of players as once differs a great deal to the objectives when playing on your own. The game has to be designed to constantly challenge its users, to entice them, and provide stable enjoyment. It must also deal with the multitude of different types of gamers - with different demographics, and most importantly, tastes. This is one way in which online gaming is changing how games are being developed.

So what's being done to prevent hackers and cheaters from ruining our fun? There is simply way too much stuff to cover to deal with most of the issues and solutions raised in online gaming security effectively, so following is a brief description of three of the major online gaming services and how they are dealing with hackers and cheaters.

Diablo

http://www.battlenet.com

Diablo is not actually an online specific game, and to use the multiplayer server, Battle.net, incurs no charges. It was developed however, with multiplayer very much in mind, and after release, continues to receive a staggering number of online users a day. In essence singleplayer with a chat room function pasted on, multiplayer has been the target of a wave of hackers and cheaters, and shows just how big the problem is, and how quickly it can spread. Almost anything and everything has been

Blizzard's Battle.net.

tampered with in Diablo. There are editors to max out your stats, to allow player killing in the town (a supposed safe haven for players, dying here can mean the loss of all of your inventory), to duplicate items, and so forth. In fact, I checked out a particularly popular editor, and the list of what it did was huge! Rather than being hacked by a the precious few, these cheat and hack programs have been accepted by a large section of Diablo players. Blizzard are releasing patches to fix these problems on a regular basis, though are fighting an uphill battle. To give you some idea of how complicated this problem is, following is a excerpt from the text accompanying an official Diablo patch *"3) Town Kill is back. We have just confirmed that this is again occurring. We will identify what they're doing and break it in the next patch"*

As it can be seen, the hackers are one step ahead. The problem has to be identified, a solution brought in, then integrated with the server. This gives plenty of time for hackers to work on the next editor. The best solution? Play in password protected games, with players you know and trust. Unfortunately, most of us gamers don't have a whole bunch of friends that can have a game when we want to, and this does also detract from the thrill one gets playing people from all over the world. You have to take the good with the bad. Other than releasing patches, Blizzard can do little else to prevent hacking/cheating.

Dark Sun online.

Dark Sun Online

http://www.ten.net

Dark Sun Online is a great example of what developers are doing to curb illegal data manipulation. It has been running for a few months now, and has been well received. Jeff Kesselman, Senior game Integration Engineer of TENetwork working on DSO, told PC PowerPlay that though they were aware that there would be a security problem with the service, experience in this field of gaming was limited and thus required a different approach - one that only experience could give. *"I'll admit that we came into DSO a little naive, but I think that everyone [that develops an online game] does. While cheaters are a very small percentage of the online population, their impact is beyond their numbers. One cheater can ruin the experience for another hundred players. The first thing we saw was bug exploitation. After fixing these bugs with a patch, players actually went on to hacking and changing the data on their computer. Also, people that hack and cheat like to corrupt others, and so forth. We have though, implemented strategies that have helped deal with problem and are continuing to develop this."*

And what have they done so far to make the game more enjoyable? Firstly, TEN are making as much of the game data server based, rather than client based. The transition though, is slow and painful. TEN also give some players (which are very carefully selected), system operator powers, which allows them to peer into other players game data. Anything suspicious is reported to TEN employees. With a log kept of the sys op's actions carried out, TEN can also monitor these players in case the sys op's themselves abuse this power. Another rather ingenious idea is to have two separate games of DSO running concurrently. There is Law World, with very serious game rules designed for serious role-players, and Chaos World, where almost anything goes (except of course, gratuitous language and the like). While not dealing directly with cheaters, it does separate the serious players from the childish ones, and makes for a much more enjoyable game.

The penalty for breaking TEN rules? Expulsion and a ban from the service. Think twice before you act.

Ultima Online.

Ultima Online

http://www.owo.com

Of all the online gaming services out there, Ultima Online has so far generated the most interest. For the beta test (which has yet to happen), 50,000 players signed up. However at this stage, Origin have released very little information regarding the issue of online gaming security. With such a large number of users, Origin admits they'll have a hard time dealing with trouble makers. There is no doubt that hacking will be a problem, so expect to see banning and the like. Origin have taken the approach that a well designed game will keep player dissatisfaction down (which is one reason why people turn to hacking and cheating). While there are other measures in store to counter hacking, Richard Garriott admits the UO team is at the mercy of players. *"Sure, we don't anticipate getting this right the first time. We're fully aware that we're going to learn a lot of really tough lessons very quickly. We're planning for this and have a lot of staff who are standing by ready to update things very quickly."* We shall have to wait and see...

Clearly, cheating and hacking is a big problem faced by online gaming developers, and its implications reach deep. The cost is reflected in the subscription fee we pay. Hacking and cheating ruins the enjoyment of those wanting a serious play, and at the end of it all, that's what really matters.

March Stepnik

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LETTERS

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Online cheats

Congrats on the mag and all. Blah blah blah, lick lick lick... lick? YUK! Sorry. Anyway, I didn't write this letter to lick your butts. No I wrote this letter to complain about the amount of cheating going on over the internet.

The main problem is Blizzard's Diablo battle.net. There almost everyone cheats. Some to a major and some to a minor extent. The minor being people duplicating items and the major being people who edit their ability scores, experience, hit points, etc... the list goes on and on. My question is why? Does it make you feel powerful to know that you can beat anyone without trying? Does it make you feel big? It shouldn't!

Cheating over the internet is not okay. Some people work long and hard to create characters who become powerful over time by PLAYING THE GAME!!! not cheating - then a cheater comes up and kills you and you loose everything. Once I shot my full mana capacity (my mana being 400) of level 10 fire balls into a level 1 sorcerer and they didn't even flinch. Then they killed me with two fireballs (being 1st level they shouldn't have even had enough magic to learn fireball). I rest my case.

Imagine what will happen in Ultima Online if people find a way to cheat? (which I am ready to bet they will). The whole game will be ruined. People who want to play the game properly will not be able to due to other people cheating and making themselves too powerful.

Cheating in a single player game is different, in that it only affects you, the cheater, and not all the other people you are playing with. So if you want to cheat in single player then go right ahead. The only person who is loosing out is you (as you won't get value out of your games).

I'm sure I'm not the only person this cheating is annoying, so if you are on the internet playing other people and you are about to cheat, then think twice about it, and hopefully you will come to the light side of the force.

WaKo
Coffs Harbour, NSW
wako1@hotmail.com

Thanks to the Battle.net experience, the online gaming community is now painfully aware of how a great game can be completely ruined by a handful of attention-seekers. Hopefully Origin will make their code hack-proof, so Ultima Online doesn't suffer the same fate. Read our special report on page 94 for more on this painfully annoying problem.

No-Intel non-entity

I would like to point out that there is no equal to your mag on the market. You've obviously done some good research. The letters department confuses me though. At the start of each letter, most people say how much they like your mag. Fine. But some of them then proceed to whinge about parts of it. What has become of the Australian tradition of "she'll be right mate!?" Instead we sound like a bunch of pommies at the cricket! Get it together readers! You either make a suggestion or you don't! Don't whine about it. And to the person who wrote in about the PCPP logo... uh... what were you thinking?

Also, in issue 11, Stephen Davies wrote in about the 'Intel juggernaut'. I myself have a 6x86 P166, not only is it much cheaper, but it runs better than my friends Pentium 166. However, when I was shopping around to buy it, some dork games salesman told me that it wouldn't run Sega games. This was not enough to discourage me from buying it, and low and behold when I bought Sega Rally the other week it worked! Funnily enough, this well known computer games store also said that they'd had a lot of trouble with the 6x86's and that is why they didn't stock it. Ha! I've had perhaps three software related crashes since I bought it six months ago. Some solid advice from computer stores to consumers is probably one of Cyrix's smaller problems. But none-the-less a problem.

Robby James Irwin
n9605091@nepean.uws.edu.au

Cyrix and AMD CPUs have thus far been less than perfect for hardcore gamers. This will change shortly, with the M2 and K6 chips, which should offer performance at least equivalent to Intel's Pentium 2 (Klamath). We covered these exciting new CPUs in PowerPlay # 11 and will be benchtesting these games-friendly chips soon.

Online alienation

I'm writing just to tell you that you are the biggest legends in Australia.

I have all of your issues and I plan on getting all of the future ones unless I die or your magazine dissolves (that would be a sad, sad day). I think you're magazine gets better and better with every issue. I especially liked the article on issue 11 that dealt with "The Next Generation of CPU's", since I'll probably be buying a new computer within the next 3-6 months. I think that the reason why MMX has not really lived up to our expectations is because we are testing it with programs that were not really coded to use MMX, I think that when computer games companies start using the MMX technology we will see a major improvement. I was wondering if you know how much more would a Klamath cost than a normal P200? I know that the P55C cost about $100 more than a normal Pentium.

I agree that Duke vs Quake is not really a valid debate since both are very different, I personally don't have a favourite cause I love them both, I've played both over a LAN network with 8 people and I think that everyone should play a networked game of Duke or Quake once in their lives. We all preferred Duke though, mainly cause it was easier to setup to play network with 8 people to play Quake we actually had to read instructions yuk!, And we all tried different rts files. The problem with Quake is that it has lame weapons. Even the most die-hard Quake fan would tell you that Duke has better weapons, iD really screwed up in that department. But Quake is really easy to setup if you are playing over the internet and I encourage everyone to play Quake in Quakeworld cause that really takes care of any lag problems that it might have and there are a lot of modifications that can be obtained for it, CTF and so forth.

I agree with David Mann from one of your letters in Issue 11 how he talks about Kali. Kali is great but I also get irritated by the people who go there just to chat. The first few times I was there I didn't know what the hell I had to do, I asked for help and most of the 14 year old sh*#h#*ds wouldn't tell me anything. All they talked was about what games they had what they were going to do in the weekend and such nonsense, I think that

Dark Reign will absolutely dominate the real-time strategy genre. We know this to be true after spending time at Auran HQ and playing the work-in-progress version hard. Look for a full review of this breakthrough game next issue.

there are quite a few thousand chat things where you can talk about that. Finally someone did help me, and I can use Kali now.

Anyway that's my 2 cents worth and thanks again for making such a class act magazine.

Jose Alvarez
brissy@bluesky.net.au

Clone wars

Your magazine rules, it is much better than the pommy crap I am used too. I have only purchased the latest four issues, but I am able to say that your magazine has great reviews and demos. KKND, as the review for KKND was in issue 7, one of the ones I missed, I was wondering about a couple of things. A) What score did you give it and what were its positives and negatives? B) Have you distributed a demo? Dark Reign, read your preview for Dark Reign and was intrigued. Is the AI as good as you proclaimed? How good are the graphics? How soon will it be before you can and will publish a full review? Will you be able to include the Dark Reign beta test version on the next demo CD? Please answer all the questions that you can.

Brian Ferguson
brian.ferguson@multiline.com.au

KKND picked up a healthy 90% in issue # 7. It's a fun C&C clone that looks great in SVGA, but is a little short on originality. Play the demo on this month's cover CD and decide for yourself.

Dark Reign just keeps looking better and better. We'll have a full review in the next issue and a demo on the CD is a safe bet.

Seoul mate

I have never subscribed to a magazine before but then there hasn't been a mag like yours before either. I love the reviews but most of all the tips you have on everything from which 3D card to buy and how to upgrade. Keep up the good work.

Marcus J McKibbin
Australian Embassy, Seoul

Multiplay

First of all let me say that PC PowerPlay is excellent.

However, I would like to correct an error in the "Australian online games" article in May's "News".

You wrote "... Multiplay remains a Kali server." Not so!

In fact Multiplay operates more servers than any other dedicated games service in Australia. As Australia's Official Quake Network we run Australia's QuakeWorld Master server, 32 player QuakeWorld servers, all the popular Quake patches and for other games, yes, Kali services.

Also, your readers might think that Internet gaming is free or less expensive than dialing directly into a dedicated games service. What people forget is that in most cases, they have to dial into an Internet Service Provider to get on the Net. With Multiplay, gamers dial direct and avoid paying ISP charges. Our hourly rate matches ISPs and our subscription rate undercuts them all. With a conservative multiplay habit of 4 hours a week, Multiplay costs less than $2 an hour. That's a better deal than the popcorn at the movies!

At $29.95 per month, and two free hours when you join ($10 worth), Multiplay works out to be far less expensive than the other offerings you discussed.

Hard-core gamers know that dialing direct and playing on a dedicated games network (no email, no news, no surfing, just hard-ass battlin') is the only way to get low latency - and enjoy super fast games.

We're very proud of what we're building for Australia - and appreciate your assistance.

Oh, and our Internet address is www.multiplay.com.au

Best regards

David "Polarbear" Urquhart
Chief Executive Officer

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flashback

Gold of the Americas

1989 www.ssg.com.au

Years before the likes of Civilisation and Colonisation, Gold of the Americas set the standard for the exploration game.

About eight years ago, when I was a mere slip of a boy, my Dad bought me a game for our feisty new IBM clone AT with its fabulously multi-coloured graphics card. It was called Gold Of The Americas. It was a strategy game by the Australian branch of wargame boffins SSG and I loved it to bits.

A brief glance at the box today would leave you less than impressed. A decidedly dodgy drawing of an old galleon, a timid title written in unreadable font, and a sticker absurdly proclaiming "Supports Hard Disk" and "Not Copy Protected" are three things guaranteed to induce a reaction somewhere between misty-eyed nostalgia and howls of stomach-cramping laughter. But since the purpose of this page is to see how well games stand the test of time, I'd better do more than just look at the box.

Hey, whaddya know? It works on my Pentium under Win95, first time and everything! Up comes the title screen with the question, "Do you wish to play with your mouse?", and I recall how amusing that was the first hundred times I played this game (with my mouse). The next screen lets me choose all the play options, Historical or Random settings for both the New World and Europe and which of the four nations I would like to be (Spain, Portugal, France, and England) and how smart I prefer my computer opponents. I select Historical, Historical, Spain and Expert and am whisked into the game.

It's still the same old turn-based conquer the "Americas", build thriving colonies, invade your enemies, kill the natives and enslave the blacks, kind of game that's not so much politically-incorrect as historically-faithful. The fundamentals are quite basic: you have money to "buy" armies, colonists, trading ships, warships, mercenaries, and slaves, while famous explorers often pop up free-of-charge to lend a hand.

Next you place these on the map (colonists into already explored areas, explorers with armies into uncharted territories, perhaps an army into a colony to quell the natives or the slaves, and your ships into the oceans to trade or pillage and sink other ships). You can also attack enemy colonies with your army, though you can only invade and capture a colony if you have one of your own in an adjacent territory, otherwise it's a mere money-grabbing raid.

At the beginning of every turn, you are sent some freebies from the motherland. However, the quality and quantity of these depends upon how well you pay your taxes. Pay up and you're rewarded well, but fail and the old guy in the funny-looking wig will be most unhappy.

Possibly the most important decision you have to make in the game comes at the end of each turn. It's here that you have to choose how to run each colony. You can either "put the boot in" which means that you squeeze every last drop of gold or minerals (ie. money) from that colony, but they won't be happy and may later declare independence, unless you also "placate" them with some hand-outs every few turns, or

"encourage development" which means raising the level of the colony from a tiny village to a huge city. The last bit is how you win the game. After the completion of 30 turns, whoever has the most points from development, not necessarily the most colonies, will win the game. Thus, striking a balance between getting money and developing is the key. You cannot win through sheer military force, thankfully.

Gold Of The Americas may seem a tad slim and simplistic nowadays, but it's a strangely addictive and compelling beast. Particularly in those final five turns in a four-player game when I'm at war with everyone else and will stop at nothing to defeat those "perfidious English dogs"!

David Wildgoose

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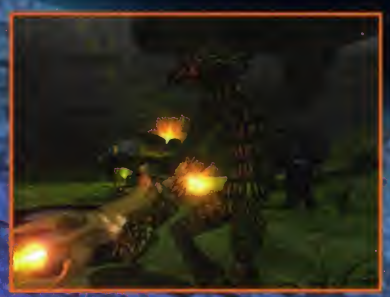

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